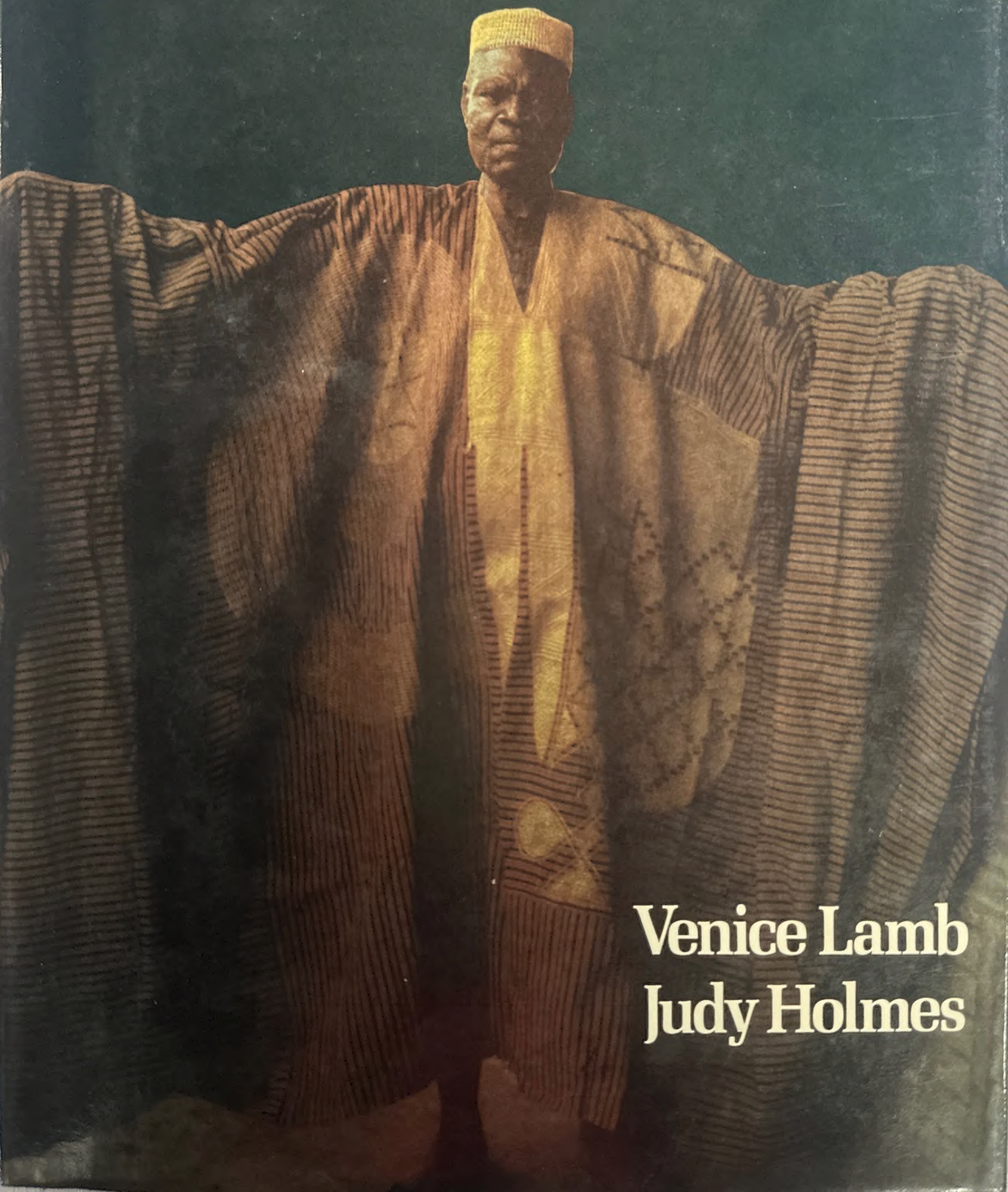


NIGERIAN WEAVING



Venice Lamb
Judy Holmes

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This book contains a systematic survey of the major Nigerian weaving traditions on a scale never before attempted. Covering not only the two main categories of weavers, the men who use the narrow horizontal loom and the women who employ a wider vertical fixed-warp loom, there is also some account of three other groups of male weavers, those using the raised ground loom in Gongola State, those in the southeastern part of the country who weave raffia on a vertical loom and, finally, the Court weavers of Benin. The work is based on original field work in Nigeria combined with the study of Nigerian cloths today preserved in museum collections outside Nigeria. It is illustrated in the main by the authors' own photographs both of weavers and of their cloth and their equipment.



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Venice Lamb & Judy Holmes

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To the weavers of Nigeria

© Venice Lamb and Judy Holmes 1980

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1 The half-title picture on page 1 shows a Fulani
woman wearing a set of wrappers known as *farago*.
These are woven on the men's wide loom in the Ningi
region of Bauchi State.

2 The title page picture on page 2 shows retainers of
the Emir (in dark robes with blankets over their
shoulders) at the Eid Festival in Katsina. Scenes like
these emphasize the traditional importance of garments
made from local cloth in Nigeria.

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3 Akajilaku—'the hand that has wealth'. An expensive modern Ibo cloth from Akwete made on the woman's loom. See Chapter 10.

Foreword

The books written on Nigeria in general and on its crafts in particular are numerous indeed. And this is not surprising, given the variety, beauty and fascination of the country and its people. Yet the craft of weaving provides a surprising gap in this literature.

One of the greatest of all Saharan travellers, Heinrich Barth, pointed the way when he was referring to weaving as the primary commerce of Kano. He wrote that 'there really is something grand in this kind of industry, which covers the north as far as Murzuk, Ghat and even Tripoli; to the west, not only to Timbuktu, but in some degree even as far as the shores of the Atlantic . . . to the east, all over Bornu, although it comes in contact with the native weaving industry of the country; and to the south it maintains the rivalry with the native industry of the I'gbira and I'gbo.' But although writers on Nigeria have touched on many and varied subjects, none has seen fit to deal with weaving on a comprehensive nationwide basis.

Weaving is a craft which is presently at risk in that factory cloth and the lure of the city are fast eroding the number of hand-weavers. I am delighted therefore that this Company has been able to initiate and support this study on weaving in Nigeria, both because the book fills a gap in Nigeria's literature and also because it is important to record such a craft while it is still possible to do so. It is a worthy contribution to an important subject—the study of Nigeria's traditional culture.

Peter F. Holmes
Managing Director
Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd

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Ala Mr Sama.

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Igara Chief Asishana Amure and family.

Ikere Ekiti Chief Benjamin Adeyina, the Elegbire of Are; Madam Esther Arowosafe.

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Zaria Mohammed Moussa and family.

In our travels in Nigeria we received a great deal of assistance from the Nigerian Tobacco Company, a truly admirable organization which possesses contacts with the remotest parts of the country. We were introduced to it by its Managing Director, Mr A. R. J. Christodolo, who thereby enabled us to find guides and interpreters

in many Nigerian districts, where, otherwise, we would have been quite lost. Among the many members of the Nigerian Tobacco Company who went out of their way to help us or advise us we would like, especially, to name the following: Alhaji and Mrs Mohammed Kyari in Zaria, Mr Angili B. Y. Mshelliza and Alhaji Isa Abdullahi in Gombe, Mr Michael Bott in Jos, Mr M. A. Kudogi in Maiduguri, Mr Lucas O. Ashaolu and Mr Benjamin Terramun Saruun in Gboko.

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The great part of the illustrations in this book are the result of the authors' own fieldwork. By permission, however, we do illustrate some cloths in the possession of the Museum of Mankind in London, the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford, the Merseyside County Museums in Liverpool and the Art Gallery and Museums in Brighton, all of which we photographed ourselves. We are also grateful to the Ulm Museum for providing us with photographs of three Weichmann cloths, and to the Basel Mission for copies of photographs in their archives. Three British publishers, Blackwood, Murray and the Oxford University Press, very kindly agreed to our making use of photographs from works by Olive MacLeod, Sir R. Palmer and C. K. Meek. Chief S. O. Alonge of Benin City most generously allowed us to make use of his photographs of Benin weaving and cloth.

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Finally, we would like to thank the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited, without whose sponsorship this book would not have been possible.

Venice Lamb
Judy Holmes

Roxford and Lagos, 1978-80

Introduction

During the last hundred years African art has exercised the most profound influence on the evolution of modern art everywhere. No major museum anywhere in the world today can afford to ignore the existence of the arts and crafts of Africa. It is an odd fact, however, that until very recently one area of indigenous African artistic genius was more or less ignored.¹ We refer to the field of textiles. It has only been in the 1970s that the public in Europe and the United States has begun to appreciate the beauty of some African cloths and to undertake their serious study.² Of late a number of European museums, including the Museum of Mankind in London, have put on displays devoted to African textiles;³ and from these it is clear that in both craftsmanship and design the weavers of Nigeria, men and women, are among the most skilled in all the continent.

Nigeria has a tradition in the weaving and dyeing of textiles which was of international importance long before the first Europeans reached the shores of West Africa in the fifteenth century. By then the relationship between the Kano region, where cloth was woven, dyed, embroidered and tailored, and the nomads of the Sahara who greatly appreciated this cloth, had been well established. By this time, moreover, we know that there was an active complex of textile industries based upon the Niger Delta and the coastal lagoons of southwestern Nigeria.

In practice, if we concentrate on those features which are purely Nigerian, we can say that the traditional Nigerian textile industry contains three basic elements. First, there is the weaving of cloth on the horizontal loom, exclusively a male preserve and



4 Weaver in Ilorin. One of the earliest photographs of the woman's vertical loom. Frobenius, 1912.

¹ Superior numbers refer to Notes at the end of each chapter.

widely distributed by the beginning of the sixteenth century if not considerably earlier. Second, there is cloth production on the vertical loom used by women. Third, there has long been established an industry involved in the dyeing and finishing of cloth both local and imported. The ramifications of this industry are considerable, and it really forms a subject in its own right. Apart from these major elements there are a number of minor ones, notably the use of the vertical loom by men in some parts of the country for the weaving of raffia or cotton, and the use, also by men, of horizontal ground looms in certain rather remote corners of eastern Nigeria.

The subject of this book is that part of the great Nigerian textile tradition which is concerned with the manufacture of cloth. We have deliberately avoided the whole field of dyeing except where it is inextricably involved with weaving. There are a number of good reasons for this decision. In the first place, much has been written already on Nigerian dyeing crafts: the literature, for example, on the whole field of *adire* cloth is quite considerable.⁴ In the second place, much of this dye treatment of cloth now involves, and has involved in the past, cloth which was imported into Nigeria and treated there. While much dyeing has always been of locally woven cloth, yet by its nature decoration by dyeing techniques is a craft which concerns cloth finishing rather than cloth making. Finally, dyeing in Nigeria has very close parallels, at least for most of the techniques involved, with dyeing in many other West African countries; and a good case could be made for treating the dyeing crafts of West Africa as a whole.

Nigerian weaving, in contrast to dyeing in its widest sense, has barely been studied to date. There exist no

comprehensive surveys of either the man's horizontal loom or the woman's vertical loom; though, of course, a considerable literature does exist on both topics. It is a fact that, on the whole, the ethnographers of the colonial period were not very interested in cloth and cloth making. Considering that British imperial strength in the nineteenth century had its own roots in the textile trades, this attitude might seem a trifle surprising. It cannot be denied, however, that men like Meek, Talbot and Temple, though they did discuss weaving, yet did so in a manner which inclined towards the superficial.⁵ While post-colonial students of Nigerian material culture have not been wanting, they too, when considering cloth, have tended to look more at the art of the dyer than of the weaver. When they did turn to weaving, there was a tendency to concentrate on those areas most easy of access, in effect those inhabited by Yoruba and within easy reach of Lagos and Ibadan, and those in and around the great northern city of Kano. It should be noted, finally, that many observers in both the colonial and post-colonial periods lacked experience in the technicalities of weaving, a craft which is not always very simple and, to the uninitiated, produces cloth in rather mysterious ways.

The object of this book has been to attempt a survey of all the major weaving traditions in Nigeria, both the male horizontal loom and the woman's vertical loom; and also to look at various other weaving crafts that might exist, such as the raffia loom, the ground loom of the Mumuye, and even methods of weaving bands and drawstrings and the like, which are interesting while involving no major industry. It has been our purpose not only to study techniques and distribution but also to provide some kind of record of the

staggeringly wide range of patterns which the genius of Nigerian weavers, both men and women, has created. In some parts of the country weaving is fast disappearing, unable to face the competition of factory made cloth. We hope that our work, presented in this book, may be of some help in preserving the memory of weavers confronted with this distressing fate. In other areas the craft is thriving but subject to rapid changes in fashion. Here we hope that we have not only reported on older traditions but also presented, so to speak, a cross section of Nigerian taste in textiles as we found it in 1978 and 1979.

During the course of our fieldwork we visited all nineteen of the states which today make up the Republic of Nigeria. Given the size of Nigeria this was a formidable task only made possible by the remarkable expansion in recent years of the internal communication system in Nigeria. We feel sure that we encountered all the major weaving groups. We are equally sure that, here and there, we must have missed out smaller communities of weavers to whom we must express our apologies. In many areas we were unable to spend as much time as we would have liked. However, we feel that we have produced something worthwhile; and it is a fact that nothing like our comprehensive survey of weaving in Nigeria has been attempted before in any West African country.

Weaving and looms

What is weaving? A classic account gives the following explanation:

If we look carefully at a piece of plain cloth we find it to consist of a number of longitudinal threads placed side by side, and intersected, or interlaced, by a continuous single thread. This thread passes alternately before and behind the longitudinal ones, and has been introduced between them from edge to edge, by some means and in such a manner as to bind them together and hold them in position. When thus united the threads are woven into a flat, orderly, and uniform-surfaced material, of more or less durability, according to the strength of the threads of which it is composed and the closeness and evenness with which the crossing thread has been pressed down and beaten together.⁶

While at first sight rather involved, this description leads us easily enough to the consideration of the main

5 Hausa luru loom illustrating the opening of the longitudinal warp threads by means of the heddles and thereby allowing these threads to be interlaced by the weft threads, thus creating the web.



elements involved in interlacing a thread across the array of longitudinal threads referred to. The longitudinal threads are the *warp*. The interlacing thread is the *weft*. The term *web* is often used either to refer to the width of the fabric as it is being woven or to the woven fabric. The apparatus which provides both for the array of warp threads and the means for the introduction of the weft thread is the *loom*.

During the course of the evolution of human civilization a number of types of loom have been devised, some simple and some complex in the extreme. But they all have certain common elements the need for which is implied in the above description. First, there must be some arrangement to move the warp threads so as to allow the weft thread to be introduced: the device which achieves this is a *heddle*, the function of which is to move one set of warp threads in a direction away from another set of warp threads to create a gap, or *shed*, through which the weft can be introduced by means of a *shuttle*. Weaving involves, in its simplest form, an alternation of two sheds and, hence, the presence of either two heddles or two devices which perform the function of heddles. In essence a heddle is a device consisting of a series of loops passed around alternate warp threads so that by moving the heddle one set of warps can be moved relative to the other. In practice it is possible to create two sheds by means of a single heddle if some other device, such as a *shed stick*, that is to say a stick placed across the warp so that groups of warp threads pass alternately on either side of it, is used; but two moving heddles make for a more rapidly working loom. It is, of course, possible to have more than the minimum number of heddles for the execution of more complicated designs.

The density of weave depends to a great extent upon two factors, the tension to which the warp threads are subjected and the method used to beat down the weft thread after it has been introduced through a shed. There are many ways to achieve this. Warp tension can be provided by the use of a frame or by means of weights or rollers pulling one end of the warp. Beating can be achieved by the use of a simple, sword-like stick or a more complicated comb-like arrangement usually known as a *beater* or *beater/reed*.

If a pair of heddles is used in a loom so that they move alternately to create alternate sheds, mechanisms must be provided for their movement. One device is to attach the heddle at its lower end to a treadle or pedal worked by the weaver's feet. A pair of heddles,

worked by a pair of treadles or pedals, can be linked together by some device such as a *pulley*, a rocking bar or *rocker* (sometimes called a *horse*), or simply by a cord or strap sliding over a smooth bar.

The warp may be laid out in a set form with both ends attached to part of the loom frame, or the warp may be, in a sense, endless in that it passes through the loom and, after weaving, is wound up on a roller, the other end being fed from some source of yarn in skeins or mounted on spindles. There are many possibilities here.

There are many ways of introducing design into the cloth. Some are based on warp arrangement, for example the use of stripes of different colours. Some are based on the weft, either by varying the colour of the weft threads or by the use of extra weft threads which need not extend right across the web. Patterns made by use of weft can become extremely complex in practice; but in principle they are all variations of the basic weaving process. The simplest weave, a regular alternation of warp and weft, is known as *tabby*. If the warp is so much denser than the weft that the weft cannot be seen at all, then the cloth is called *warp-faced*; if, on the other hand, the weft obscures the warp, then the cloth is *weft-faced*. In tabby, the balance between warp and weft should be about even. In patterning it is possible to arrange that either warp or weft threads *float* over the surface of the web with the effect, for example, that a pattern on one side of the cloth is invisible on the other. Other methods may produce patterning which is visible on both sides of the cloth: such patterning is *reversible*.

There are many methods of patterning which need not be discussed here. One device, however, which is common in Nigeria, deserves mention. Many Nigerian weavers use techniques of the kind generally referred to as tie-dye or resist dye. The technical terminology for this art is derived from Indonesian practice.⁷ *Ikat* involves the fixing of bundles of warp threads in such a way before dyeing that some lengths of the bundle are protected from the dye and others exposed to it. *Tritik* and *plangi* are two methods of sewing with resist material a woven cloth so as, after dyeing, to produce patterns arising from the presence of dyed and undyed sectors of the cloth surface. Strictly speaking, *tritik* means the outlining of the pattern by sewing with a resist material like raffia, and *plangi* involves sewing the cloth into bunches, usually round small pebbles or the like, to produce circular designs.

Of all the many loom types devised by human

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ingenuity over the ages we will encounter in Nigeria but three, though one of those must be subdivided into two categories. These three are

- 1 the narrow horizontal treadle loom
- 2 the vertical loom with fixed or rotating warp
- 3 the raised horizontal ground loom

The narrow horizontal treadle loom is found throughout West Africa from Cape Verde to Cameroun in a belt between the Sahara and the Atlantic Ocean. While this loom in this great area occurs in numerous forms, for all practical purposes the Nigerian varieties have certain essentials in common. The core of the loom contains a pair of heddles operated by pedals or toe grips and a comb-like beater. The warp is attached at the weaver's end to a *breast beam*, round which it is wound after weaving. At the other end, stretched out away from the weaver and the working parts of the loom, the warp is attached to a *drag weight*, in its simplest form a flat piece of wood weighted down with stones. The process of weaving and winding on to the breast beam causes the warp to pull the drag weight forward. The friction of the drag weight on the ground provides the basic tension of the warp. The warp in this loom is narrow. In Nigeria it can be narrower than one inch, though it can also have a width of over two feet. The working parts of the loom, that is to say the heddles and the beater, along with the warp and the woven cloth wound on to the breast beam, can in all Nigerian looms of this class be removed from the main frame of the loom with ease and replaced there when the weaver so wishes. The loom is horizontal, which means that the warp runs through the loom parallel to the ground. In Nigeria, with some exceptions so rare that they can for all practical purposes be ignored, this loom is used exclusively by men. The horizontal treadle loom in West Africa may use more than a single pair of heddles. Some Asante looms in Ghana, for example, have no less than three pairs of heddles; and the elaborate Manjaca and Papel looms in Guinea-Bissau use, apart from the main heddle pair, large numbers of supplementary heddles, perhaps thirty or more in some cases. In Nigeria, for all practical purposes, we can concentrate on looms with but one pair of main heddles; though some looms, such as those of the Yoruba and the Jukun, may use rather elementary supplementary heddles consisting of no more than threads attached to certain groups of warp threads and called into play for certain types of patterning.



6 The narrow horizontal treadle loom used by men in Nigeria. 7 The vertical loom with a rotating warp, used by women. Okra



8 The Mumuye raised horizontal ground loom with single heddle worked from the side by men. Zing



Of the vertical loom in Nigeria there are two main sub-types. In the first, which, with one most interesting exception, is only used by women and which has much the same design throughout Nigeria, the warp is mounted vertically between two horizontal beams in such a way that it makes around those beams an endless belt. As weaving proceeds, the warp in fact rotates around the two beams. The length of the warp, by definition, therefore can only be just over double the distance between the two beams. Looms of this precise type only occur in significant numbers in Nigeria and are not a general feature of West African weaving.

In the second sub-type of the vertical loom in Nigeria, the warp is fixed to the two horizontal beams and cannot move. The warp length, therefore, is that of the distance between the beams. This loom type is used by men and not women. Its main purpose is for the weaving of raffia. Looms of this general type are found down the western side of the African continent from Nigeria through Cameroun, Gabon, Congo and Zaire to Angola; and a few examples have been reported to the west of Nigeria in, for example, Ghana and Sierra Leone. It is possible that some relationship exists between these two sub-types of the vertical loom; but, if so, its precise nature is by no means clear. It may possibly be significant that some raffia looms in Nigeria have adopted the rotating warp so characteristic of the woman's vertical loom.

Both sub-types of vertical loom share one feature in common. In both the heddle arrangement is quite different from that in the horizontal treadle loom. Instead of a pair of heddles working in opposite directions to each other by means of a link through a pulley or some such device, these looms only have one heddle in the sense of an arrangement of loops connected to alternate warp threads. This heddle is not attached to any treadle or other activating mechanism. It simply floats on the warp to make one shed. The second shed is created by a fixture, a shed stick. Of course, in some cases where more complex patterning requires it, supplementary heddles are possible. Basically, however, we have here a one-heddle loom.

Our third loom type, the raised ground loom, is really in its essentials a horizontal version of the vertical loom of (as far as Nigeria is concerned) the fixed warp type. Some writers on looms, Eric Broudy for example, have placed these vertical and ground looms in the same category, that of the two-bar loom.⁸ The point, here, is that in both cases the warp is either

attached to or runs around two bars which mark the outer limits of the loom. At some point between these two bars, by means of one heddle (with or without supplementary heddles), and one shed stick, weaving takes place. There exist a number of types of ground loom in Africa, the best known being those used by certain Saharan nomad women for the weaving of cloth for tent making and the like. The Nigerian ground loom falls into a rather more specialized category of which there are a number of variants in Cameroun. It is used by men. The warp is stretched between two bars which, instead of being pegged directly to the ground, are raised by attachment to vertical stakes at the four corners. In the one Nigerian example, that of the Mumuye, the warp is raised sufficiently high off the ground to enable the weaver to sit with his knees beneath it. In some Cameroun examples the warp is much closer to the ground and there are some special devices both for the seating of the weaver and for the operation of the single movable heddle. These variants need not concern us here. The most interesting point is that in its essential parts the raised ground loom very closely resembles the vertical loom; and one cannot exclude the possibility that, in a sub-Saharan African context, there is some historical relationship between the two types. Of all the three loom types found in Africa, the raised ground loom is the one which has been the subject of the least research.

History

The presence of woven textiles in Nigeria is of great antiquity. Recent archaeological research at Igbo-Ukwu has revealed evidence of a number of textiles, based on fibres other than cotton, in use in Nigeria in the period c. 700 to c. 1050 AD; though we know very little about either how they were woven or by whom.⁹ Archaeology in Benin has yielded evidence of the use of most sophisticated cloth of both cotton and raffia at a period perhaps as early as the thirteenth century AD.¹⁰ Again, the origins are uncertain, but there are grounds for thinking that these cloths must have been woven if not in Benin then in some region adjacent to it. The discovery of spindle whorls in the same site is strong evidence for some local cloth manufacture at least.

It may be that by the thirteenth century the raffia-weaving vertical loom, which certainly existed down much of the western African coast from Cameroun southwards to Angola prior to the Portuguese contacts in the fifteenth century, was already established in

Benin and the neighbouring regions of the Niger Delta; and it may be that from this evolved the vertical looms, using cotton or cotton and raffia mixed, now so well established among Edo, Yoruba, Ibo and Igbira women weavers. It is certainly a supportable hypothesis that the Nigerian woman's vertical loom had its origins in the vertical raffia loom of southwestern Africa. The transition from raffia to cotton could be explained by the fact that Nigeria is the first point where the diffusion of this loom would encounter cotton, a product of the savannah rather than the rain forest.

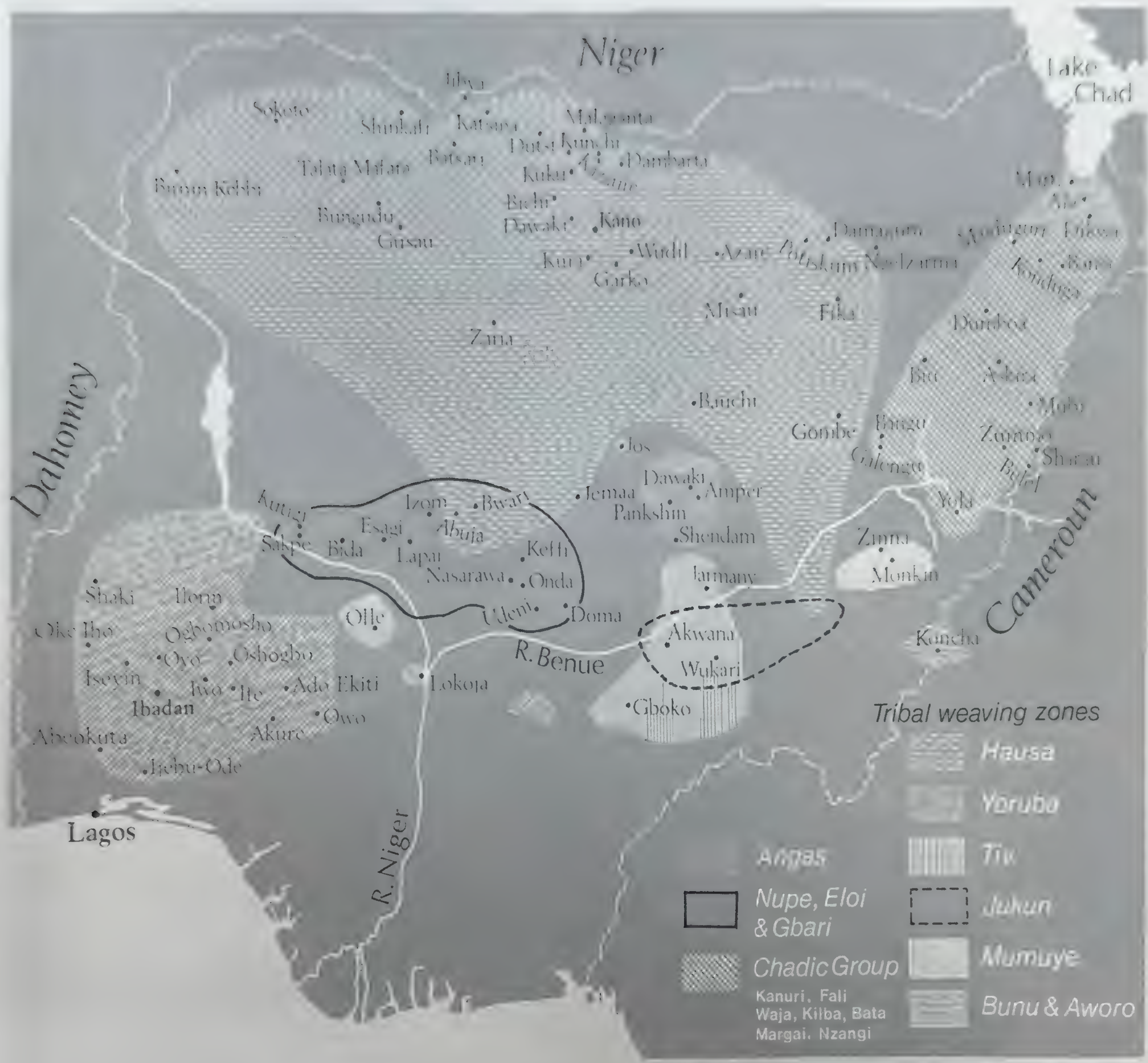
The horizontal loom in Nigeria, used by men, most probably has a northern origin. There is evidence to suggest that cotton spread westward from Nubia on the upper Nile somewhere around the beginning of the Christian Era if not earlier;¹¹ and cotton became associated in sub-Saharan West Africa with the demand for cloth by the desert nomads and by the ability of the peoples living along the southern edge of the desert, particularly in the neighbourhood of the Niger bend, to meet that demand with their weaving skills. In the fourteenth century we know that rolls or strips of cotton cloth were being used as currency in Borno; and by that time the trade links between the weavers and dyers of the Kano region and the Tuareg and other nomads of the Sahara had been well established. While archaeology is still rather reticent on this kind of subject, the fact that large numbers of cloths, many characteristic of the modern production of the West African narrow horizontal loom, have recently been found in burial caves in the Bandiagara cliffs in Mali and not much over 600 miles as the crow flies from Kano, is instructive. Some of these cloths have been dated with reasonable certainty to around 1000 AD; and there are good grounds for supposing that similar cloths would have been circulating in northern Nigeria at that period.¹²

From the north the horizontal loom, then as now used by men, made its way coastwards via Nupe to the country of the Yoruba. By the end of the fifteenth century, when the Portuguese first came into contact with Benin, they found flourishing there a well established cloth trade into which they entered with considerable profit. By this time the evidence suggests that both main categories of Nigerian loom, the narrow horizontal loom used by men, and the vertical loom used by women, were hard at work in the Benin hinterland to supply an expanding demand. The main raw material was cotton; but we can be reasonably sure that raffia was being woven as well. An idea of the

scale of this trade is indicated by the experience of the Portuguese trader Bastiam Fernandez who, in the first decade of the sixteenth century, in one transaction, bought no less than 1,816 cloths at Ughoton, the Benin port, for sale further west along the coast on the Costa da Mina (the Gold Coast or Ghana).¹³ In the sixteenth century cloth became a measure of value in the Benin trade; and in the following century it was still of such importance that the French traveller Barbot devoted much energy to the description of the Benin cloth industry.¹⁴ Cloth was drawn from a wide hinterland and in many varieties. It was traded from Benin to the Gold Coast to the west and to Angola to the southeast. Barbot's account, though not without its difficulties, suggests that cloth was coming down to Benin from as far inland as Nupe; and there is a hint that some of the cloths which could be acquired in Benin were of the three-panel variety, that is to say large cloths made up of three pieces woven on the woman's vertical loom such as are still made, for example, by modern Igbira women weavers. The predominant dye used in these Benin cloths was certainly indigo.

Barbot's experiences relate to the end of the seventeenth century. By that time a number of examples of cotton cloth from the Benin region had already reached Europe where they can be seen to this day. These cloths were collected by the German traveller C. Weichmann who, in the middle of the seventeenth century, brought them back to his native town of Ulm. Here, along with much else that Weichmann picked up on his travels, which seem to have embraced the Arctic as well as the Far East, his cloths passed into the hands of Ulm Cathedral.¹⁵ Today, in the Ulm Museum a special room is devoted to Weichmann's collection. Along with a wooden Yoruba divination tray, justly famous among historians of the arts of West Africa, are two robes. In the Museum store, which we visited in 1971, there is a third robe (and there may well be more which we were unable to locate). One robe, that not on display, was an embroidered gown, *riga*, of the type which was still being made in northern Nigeria in 1978 and 1979. It was made from very narrow strip woven on a man's horizontal loom, presumably of the kind typical of the modern Hausa, and had been dyed in indigo and subsequently beaten to give it a glaze, just as is done today in the Kano region to produce an effect much loved by the Saharan Tuareg.

The second Weichmann robe was a curious garment made from a mixture of narrow strips of the kind



9 Map showing the distribution of the man's horizontal loom in Nigeria. All the place names shown represent weaving regions and have been marked the same size irrespective of their demographic importance.



10 and 11 These two robes were collected from the Benin coast before 1659 by C. Weichmann. They are now in the Ulm Museum, Germany.



characteristic of the male Hausa weavers of *blanket* *luru*, today, and pieces of broadcloth, possibly of non-African origin, again indigo dyed and beaten. The third robe was of quite narrow strip, seven inches wide, which had been tie-dyed after tailoring with a criss-cross pattern of white circles executed by a technique known as *plangi*.

Between them, the three Weichmann robes cover quite a wide field of Nigerian textile types and textile finishing techniques. The loom they represent is the narrow horizontal loom; though it is just possible that the broadcloth in the second robe was a particularly finely woven product of a woman's vertical loom. We think this unlikely; but it would require a careful technical analysis to be sure.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century the experiences of the French trader J. F. Landolphe tell us a great deal about the cloth trade on the Nigerian coast.¹⁶ Landolphe is probably our first European source for the history of the Court cloths of the Oba of Benin. At this time there were many women weavers in Benin, working in their homes on the vertical loom. Special skills were called upon for the weavers in the Oba's Palace, at this time women, to produce cloths required by the Oba for ceremonial use. Nearly a century later, when Sir Richard Burton was in Benin, it seems that these cloths were still the work of women. Today, while woven on the vertical loom, they are made by men, the *Owina N'Ido* Royal Weavers, who are probably the only significant male users in Nigeria of this piece of equipment. The *Owina N'Ido* weavers will be considered again later on in this book.

With the opening of the nineteenth century our sources for Nigerian weaving increase dramatically in number as European explorers began to penetrate the hinterland. In the 1820s Lander and Clapperton observed the thriving cloth industry of Nupe, where male weavers on the horizontal loom were supplying cloths both to the Yoruba and to the peoples of Northern Nigeria who held Nupe cloth in particular esteem. In 1841 W. Allen and T. R. H. Thompson collected many cloths at Egga (today called Eggan) on the south bank of the Niger at what might be considered a cultural watershed between the Nupe on the north and the Yoruba on the southeast.¹⁸ In 1843 the British Colonial Office in London handed this collection over to the British Museum, where it has been ever since. It contains a cross section of cloths woven both on the man's horizontal loom and the woman's vertical loom; and as a source of information

on Nigerian taste in cloth design well over a century ago, the Egga collection is priceless. It shows clearly the antiquity of many of the major cloth types found in modern Nigeria.

Just over a decade after the Egga collection was made the great explorer Heinrich Barth was investigating the ramifications of the cloth trade centred on Kano with its penetration of the nomad markets of the Sahara.¹⁹ In the 1870s Barth's data was much amplified



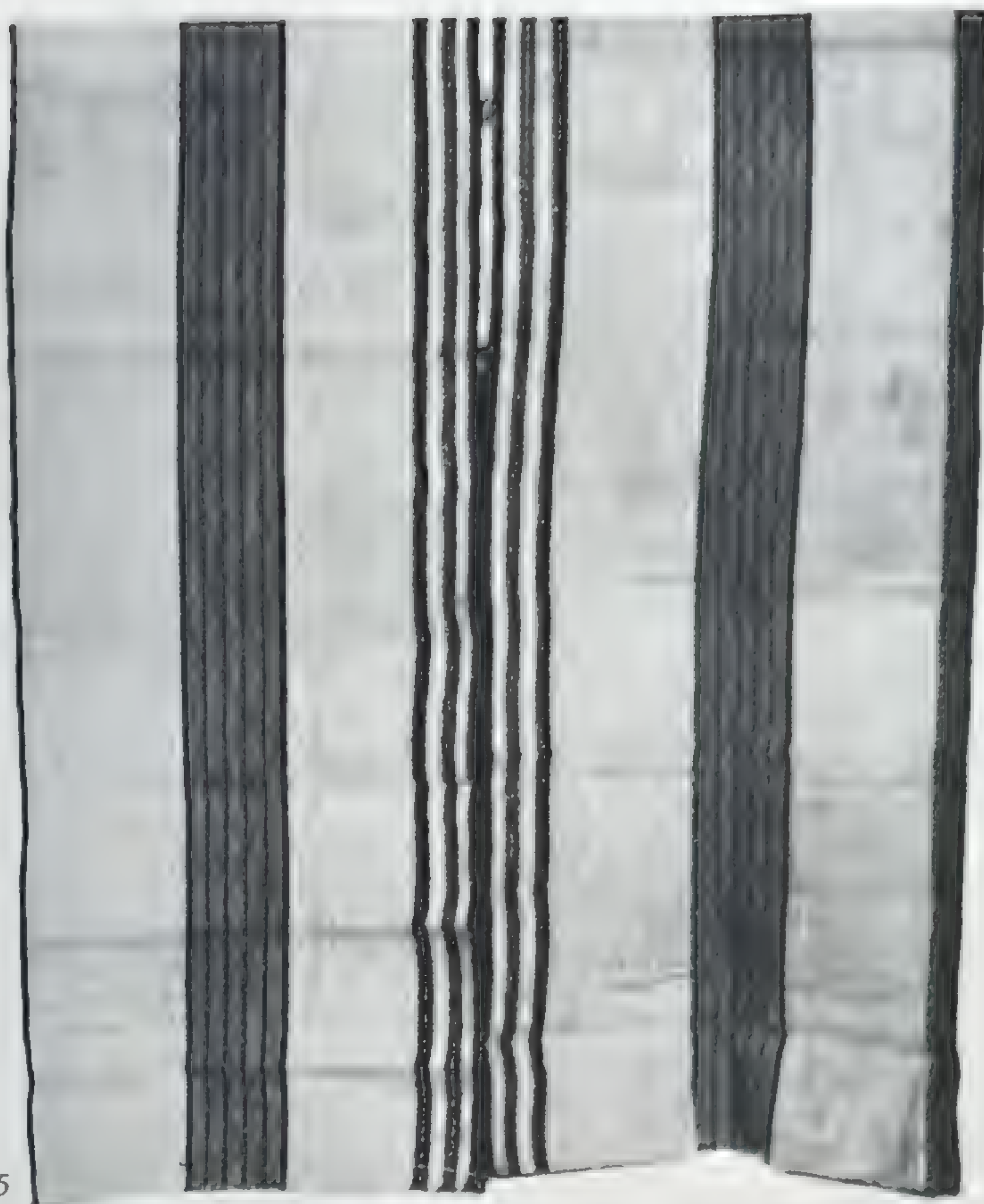
12 A fine Yoruba agbada from Ilorin. The ground weave is senior etu, and the white silk embroidery motif of the spiral agbala is exceptionally large. The rest of the embroidery is yet to be completed.



13 An old and important agbada of the red alaari group. It was in the possession of the King of Dahomey in 1863. Yoruba origin. British Museum, London.

by that extraordinary German traveller Gustav Nachtigal, who recorded the use of cloth in Borno and surrounding regions.²⁰ By this date a great deal had been learnt about the Confluence, and the valley of the Benue river leading to Adamawa, by such travellers as Schön, Crowther, Hutchinson and Baikie during the 1840s and 1850s.²¹ As the nineteenth century ended and the twentieth century began, further light was cast on the eastern and northeastern fringes of Nigeria by German and French official exploration directed towards the shores of Lake Chad from a variety of starting points. Finally, we should mention the illustrations of Yoruba weaving produced in 1910–12 by the German traveller Frobenius and the work, under British colonial rule, of a number of energetic ethnographers like Meek, Temple and Talbot.²²

This heroic age of the European exploration of Nigeria, in which the people mentioned above are but a few of the participants, took place alongside a profound change in the internal structure of the politics of what was to become Nigeria as a result of the rise of the Fulani Empire. The impact of the Fulani Emirs on the evolution of Nigeria, even in regions



15

15 Woman's weave cloth of the kiihipa type. From the Egga collection of 1841. British Museum, London.



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14 A woodcut of the riga collected by Barth during one of his visits to Kano between 1849 and 1855. Illustrated in Barth Vol II, 1857.

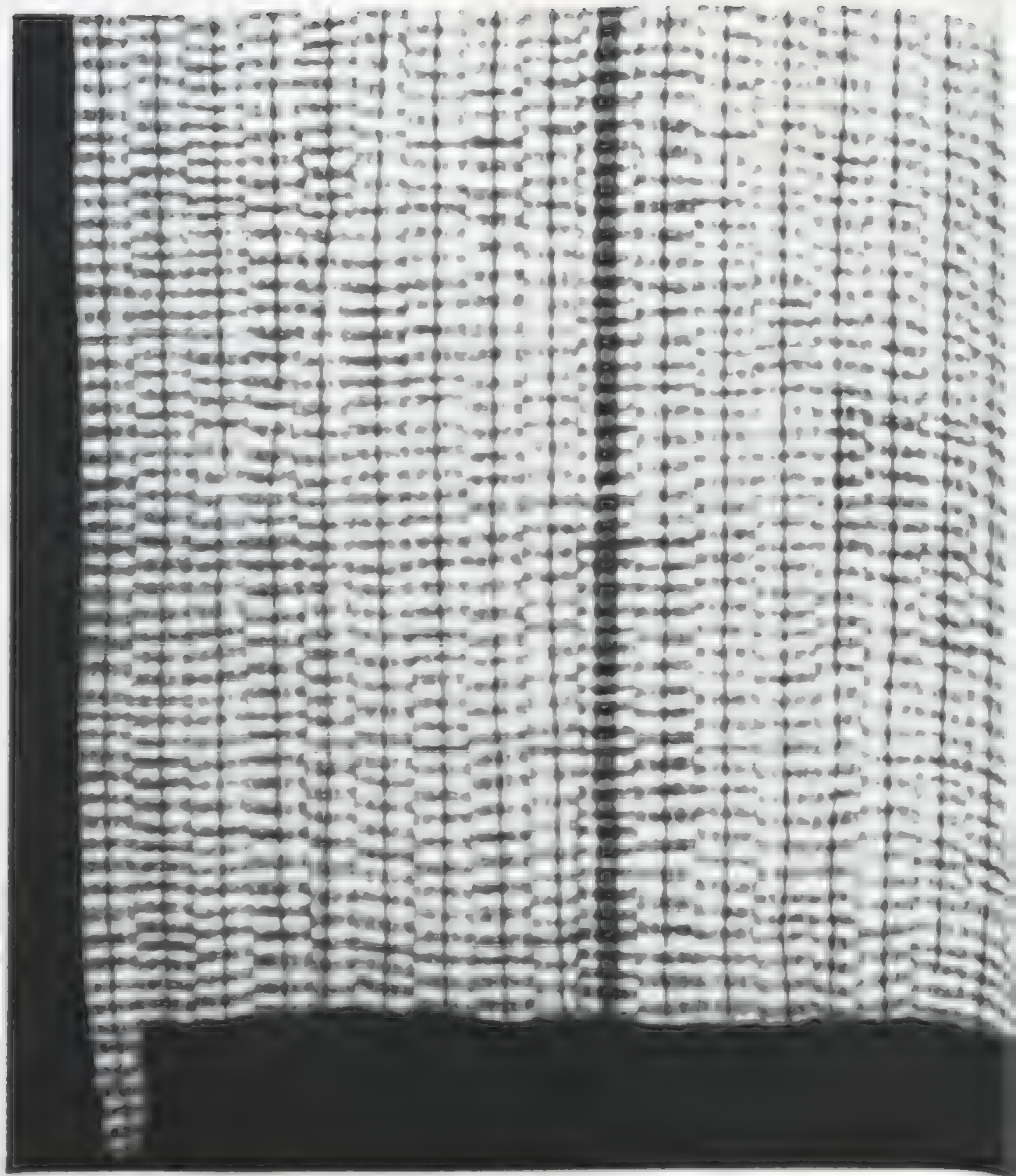


16 A drawing of a Yola man in Adamawa. Passarge, 1895.

which never came under their direct influence, was indeed profound. For our present purposes it is only necessary to observe that this great revolution centred on northern Nigeria, but with an impact over a far wider region it served to spread fashions in cloth and to modify older patterns of trade. The Fulani Courts created demand for ceremonial dress; and Fulani Court practice was an influence on others. The legacy of the Emirs and their retainers mounted so gloriously on horseback can be seen, for example, in what is now considered traditional Yoruba dress. The Yoruba gowns and smocks, *dandogo* and *gbariye*, still retain the pair of openings through which their wearers could hold their horses' reins. This feature, which now serves only as the opening of pockets, can be seen even in garments intended for very young boys. It reveals an equestrian origin as clearly as does, for example, the split tails of a European frock coat.

In the pages that follow we have considered to some degree the weaving traditions of Nigeria against their historical background. It must be admitted, however, that many of the historical sources that have been referred to above are rather unspecific as to details of cloth design and weaving technique. Apart from a few dated collections, like those of Weichmann in the seventeenth century and Allen and Thompson at Egga in 1841, we have surprisingly little detailed information. Many travellers found cloth of little interest to them. A few, like Barth and Nachtigal, did try to record in detail; but many did not. Even with the advent of photography towards the end of the

17 View of a Yoruba weaving shed in Ilorin. Frobenius, 1912



18 A very fine Yoruba narrow strip man's weave cloth in red and white, from the Egga collection of 1841 in the British Museum, London

nineteenth century, the student of textiles cannot but feel that opportunities were lost. Many great weaving traditions must have died out unrecorded. However, a great deal from the past has survived in the living traditions of weavers throughout Nigeria. As a source not only for the state of their craft today but also for its past history, the living weaver and the product of his or her skill cannot be rivalled. In the pages that follow we have done our best to avail ourselves of that great store of knowledge. We can only feel a sense of privilege and gratitude that so many weavers, both men and women, all over Nigeria, were willing to spend so much time explaining their craft to us. We hope that the result of our endeavours will be of some interest to Nigerians now and in years to come.

Words in Nigerian languages

Throughout this book we will have to use words and expressions in a variety of Nigerian languages relating to weaving, cloth and the use of cloth. Where possible we have checked our field information against standard reference works such as Abraham's Hausa and Yoruba dictionaries. Unfortunately, even in Hausa and Yoruba we have encountered terms which have

escaped the notice of the lexicographers; and in some areas of Nigeria we have had to cope with languages for which we can find no dictionaries at all.

The majority of our words and expressions in Nigerian languages were provided for us in the field by people who, while skilled in weaving and the understanding of cloth, were rarely as skilled in matters of transcription and transliteration. Hence, in many cases we have had to content ourselves with our own phonetic recording, often complicated by the need to work through several interpreters. We can only hope that scholars in the field of Nigerian languages are not too critical of some of our results.

In this book we have deliberately avoided the use of special letters, diacritical marks, accents and the like in our spelling of words in Nigerian languages, in the interest both of readability and of typographical simplicity. Where possible, we have adhered to the most widely accepted spellings; but in a number of cases we have had to exercise our own judgement.

Notes

¹ Probably the first detailed account of the indigenous weaving in any West African country was M. C. F. Easmon, *Sierra Leone Country Cloths*, London 1924. In the last decade or so there have been a number of important studies. See, for example: A. Carreira, *Panaria*, Lisbon 1968; R. Boser-Sarivaxévanis, *Les tissus de l'Afrique Occidentale*, Basel 1972; B. Menzel, *Textilien aus Westafrika*, 3 vols, Berlin 1972; K. Kent, *Introducing West African Cloth*, Denver 1971; V. Lamb, *West African Weaving*, London 1975; J. B. Eicher, *Nigerian Handcrafted Textiles*, Ile-Ife 1976.

² Probably the first exhibition which attempted a survey of the wide field of African textiles was that which opened in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1972 and then moved on to Los Angeles, San Francisco and Cleveland. See: R. Sieber, *African Textiles and Decorative Arts*, New York 1972.

The Textile Museum in Washington, D.C., held an exhibition in 1975 of West African narrow strip cloth. See: V. & A. Lamb, *The Lamb Collection of West African Narrow Strip Weaving*, Washington D.C. 1975.

³ The Museum of Mankind display opened in December 1979. A catalogue was also produced at this time. See: J. Picton and J. Mack, *African Textiles*, London 1979.

⁴ See, for example: J. Barbour & D. Simmonds, eds., *Adire Cloth in Nigeria*, Ibadan 1971.

⁵ The relevant works of these writers are listed in the Bibliography.

⁶ L. Hooper, *Hand-Loom Weaving Plain and Ornamental*, London 1910, reprinted 1979. For simple explanations of weaving, see: B. Burt, *Weaving*, London 1977; H. Coates, *Weaving for Amateurs*, London 1941; F. J. Christopher, *Hand-Loom Weaving*, London 1951.

⁷ For a good survey of the techniques of dyeing and the literature on the subject, see: J. L. Larsen, *The Dyer's Art, Ikat, Batik, Plangi*, New York 1976.

⁸ See: E. Broudy, *The Book of Looms. A History of the Handloom from Ancient Times to the Present*, New York 1979.

⁹ See, for example: T. C. Shaw, *Igbo-Ukwu*, London 1970, Vol. I, p. 243.

¹⁰ G. Connah, *The Archaeology of Benin*, Oxford 1975, pp. 236, 251.

¹¹ For a discussion of the African origins of cotton, see: R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology*, Vol. IV, Leiden 1964, pp. 46–9.

¹² The cloths were first found by a team from the University of Utrecht led by Professor Huizinga. See: V. Lamb, *West African Weaving*, op. cit., pp. 75–80; R. Bedaux, *Tellem*, Berg en Dal 1977.

¹³ A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans 1485–1897*, London 1969, p. 37.

¹⁴ J. Barbot, 'A description of the Coast of North and South Guinea', in A. & J. Churchill, *Collection of Voyages and Travels*, Vol. V., London 1746.

¹⁵ The Weichmann cloths were first published in V. Lamb, *West African Weaving*, op. cit. The reason for their survival is that the Weichmann family went bankrupt shortly after C. Weichmann had returned from his travels, and Ulm Cathedral, to which the Weichmann family owed a great deal of money, took over all the Weichmann possessions including C. Weichmann's curiosities gathered on his travels. In normal circumstances the Weichmann material would have long since disappeared.

¹⁶ See: Ryder, op. cit., p. 207.

¹⁷ Sir R. Burton, 'My wanderings in West Africa, by a F.R.G.S., Part II. The renowned city of Benin', *Fraser's Magazine*, LXVII 1865.

¹⁸ See: M. Johnson, 'Cloth on the banks of the Niger', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, VI, 1973, for the background to the Egga Collection.

¹⁹ H. Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, 5 vols, London 1857–8.

²⁰ See Bibliography. The Fisher edition of Nachtigal's travels is still not complete. At the time of writing, two volumes have been published and a third, which we were able to see in proof, is about to be published.

²¹ See Bibliography.

²² These travellers' narratives are listed in the Bibliography.

Part one: The Horizontal Loom by Venice Lamb

28 Yoruba weaver in Akure. Note the simple supplementary heddle to the left of the loom, no more than a loop of yarn, used to make a shed which is here kept open by means of a sword stick



The Yoruba

The largest concentrations in Yorubaland today of male weavers using the horizontal narrow strip loom are to be found in Iseyin, Oyo, Oshogbo and Ilorin; and somewhat smaller weaving groups are to be found in Ogbomosho and Abeokuta. From these main centres, inevitably, weavers have moved out into the surrounding towns and villages. On the basis of fieldwork and the literature it is possible to sketch in the general pattern of this expansion of the Yoruba male weaver.

The most important migration has, perhaps, been from Iseyin and Oyo, whence weavers have moved to Ibadan,¹ where they now form a significant group in that city, and to Ife, where they serve the Court of the Oni of Ife.² There are smaller groups from Iseyin and Oyo in, for example, Iwo, Shaki, Ido-Ekiti and Ado-Ekiti.³ Iseyin weavers can be found as far westward from their home town as Oke-Iho, and a few scattered groups live as far to the north as Mokwa in Nupe country.⁴

Another weaver expansion has been based on Ilorin, whence weavers have moved not only into the surrounding villages but also into Yagba country, around Egbe in particular. Some have settled in Lokoja on the Niger;⁵ a few are to be found in Owo and Woroko-Itaki; and there are (1979) about forty weavers of Ilorin extraction still at work in Akure.⁶ Several hundred Ilorin weaving families, seeking a less congested environment, have moved to Ijebu-Ode.⁷ One can find Ilorin weavers in Jos, where their output is much appreciated by the local Yoruba community; and a few have settled as far east as Keffi.

It is fairly unusual for Yoruba weavers to work alone in isolated villages. They prefer, where possible, to form communities; and in the larger towns they often take over an entire quarter for their own. In Iseyin, for



20 Yoruba looms at work in Ilorin.

instance, which is probably the most important and the oldest of the Yoruba weaving centres, in 1952–3 one male in five was a weaver; and the Ole-Oke section of Iseyin is given over entirely to the textile craft: here every aspect of it can be found to the exclusion of any other occupation. In 1952–3, according to Dodwell's estimate, Iseyin produced some million square yards of cloth each year, consuming in the process about 20 per cent of all the yarn then imported into Nigeria.⁸ We were, unfortunately, unable to obtain statistics for 1978–9. In Ilorin, as in Iseyin, the weavers and the craftsmen allied to them occupy an entire quarter, the Pakata, a huge area in which live thousands of families either dependent on or involved to some extent in the business of making cloth.

We cannot provide a detailed estimate of the number of Yoruba male weavers at work today. In the major centres of Iseyin, Oshogbo and Ilorin the weavers alone must number many thousands; and to these one must add the various craft workers related to weaving, such as spinners, dyers, sewers and embroiderers, as well as those concerned with the distribution and sale both of raw materials and finished cloth. Even without precise figures, there can be no doubt that taken together all these people make up a significant component of the Yoruba economy.



21 The family weaving shed in a Yoruba compound in Ilorin. The use of thatching still persists, but many long roofs are now covered by corrugated metal sheets

The organization of the craft

Where possible, Yoruba weavers prefer to work in large family compounds where, under covered sheds, looms are ranged side by side in long rows in front of communal seating ledges or platforms. Some sheds may contain as many as twenty looms, though twelve is a more usual number. The sheds, with their long roofs of thatch or corrugated iron and generally with a wall not far behind, provide the weavers both with a deep shade and a measure of privacy.

Among the Yoruba weaving is still very much a lineage craft; and it is normal to expect all male members of a weaving family to have acquired the skills of the craft. In such a family the most senior member, perhaps the grandfather, will be the chief weaver (the *Bale* or *Afari Agbe*) of the compound. Under his supervision and control will work brothers, sons, nephews and grandsons. However, while the family compound system provides each member with a secure place of work and, in his youth, with craft training, yet, within it, all adult males can work as self-employed craftsmen rather than, in the strict sense, for the *Bale*. In other words, while cooperating together and operating in many ways as a family unit, each individual worker can still act to a great extent as his own man and make his own financial arrangements direct with his own customers. This status, however, is

only reached when the weaver has managed to become financially independent of the *Bale* so that he can provide himself with yarn and equipment and, indeed, is in a position to marry.⁹ Until this has been achieved he must, in effect, work for the *Bale*, who will see to it that he gets a share of the work coming into the compound.



22 An old Yoruba Bale, master of the compound Ilorin

Under the strict eye of the *Bale*, boys from about the age of eight are instructed in the weaver's craft; and they are expected to put in long hours until their schooling is completed. At first they are taught the easier work of winding spools and preparing warps. Later they start to master the more complicated art of using the loom. Very small boys soon become quite skilled; and it is not uncommon to see representatives of a wide range of age groups seated side by side in a Yoruba weaving shed. The young weaver remains under the control of the *Bale* until about eighteen years of age, when, if he has become sufficiently expert, he will be eligible for a degree of independence within the social structure of the compound. Eventually, he may become quite wealthy and, perhaps, set up his own compound where he may even employ weavers not of his own family group. In this way fairly big businesses may arise. A senior weaver, moreover, may expand to become a cloth seller on a scale large enough to involve the output of more than one compound and to take under his wing other categories of textile workers such as dyers and tailors.

It can be seen, therefore, that weaving compounds are not of necessity confined to members of any one family. I was told at one such compound in Ogbomosho that its members, while they were all of that town, were not all related to each other. They had grouped together to pool their resources in the construction of a

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24 Yoruba weaver on his way to work. He carries with him all the working parts of the loom, including the breast beam.

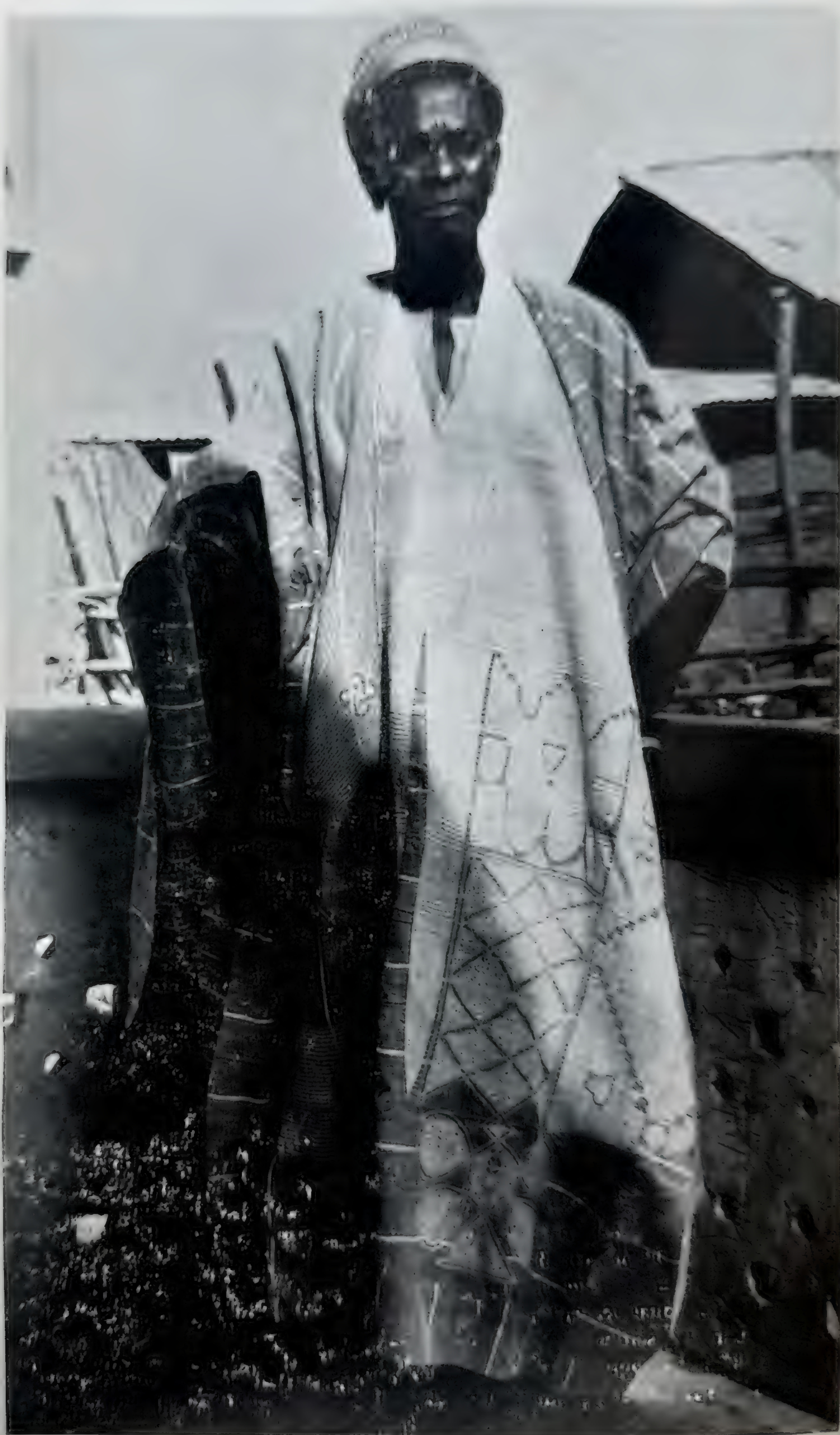
23 Young Yoruba boy working in the family shed at Oshogbo.

shed and to get started in their trade. It is probable that many of the members of this kind of compound have not come from weaving families; and, in consequence, have sought the leadership of an unrelated senior weaver.

Boys who wish to be trained as weavers and do not have the background of a weaving family can, after payment of a fee, become apprenticed to a *Bale*. The apprenticeship, which lasts from five to seven years, is known as *omaise*. Any boy is eligible provided that his references satisfy the *Bale* and he can convince the *Bale* of his ability and willingness to honour his side of the agreement. The apprentice is often allowed two days each week to work on his own account and to retain the money so earned. For the rest of the week he works for the *Bale*. During his apprenticeship the boy is fed and clothed by the compound.

A weaver has a number of means at his disposal for the raising of finance for his work. He may borrow yarns, and even the use of a loom in a shed, from another weaver whom he may repay either in cash or in work. He may earn cash by working part time for a weaver who, perhaps, has more orders than he can handle on his own. Finally, lacking both money and

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25 Alhaji Shitu, the
Aloga Aso Oke in
Iseyin, in 1978.

loom, a weaver can always hire himself out to a senior weaver or cloth dealer who will supply all materials and equipment and pay on a piece-work basis.

A non-weaver who acted as entrepreneur for a weaving business was Alhaji Adebayo Daodu, whom I met in Ilorin. He told me that at one time he used to employ some thirty weavers but that now (1979) he only had six. The weavers would come to Alhaji to collect the allotment of yarn for specific orders and would return with the completed cloths. Alhaji completely controlled the business, taking orders, supplying yarn, arranging patterns and, after the cloth was woven, organizing the sewing together of the strips.

The weaving compounds in each major centre will belong to the weaving guild of the town, which every weaver must join before he can practise. The guild is headed by a chief weaver, in Iseyin called *Aloga Aso Oke*, who presides over a council of senior or elder members, men whose rank is determined by their age and the length of their membership of the guild. In Iseyin the guild council has some one hundred members presided over by the chief weaver, Alhaji Shitu (in 1978), who attained this position by strict order of seniority.

The original function of the guild would seem to have been to make direct representations on behalf of the weavers to the Oba or Chief of the area concerned.¹⁰ The guild head could approach the Oba without having to seek permission from anyone else. This was an important right because it enabled the guild to play a major role in assessing the tax or tribute (usually in kind) levied by the Chief. The guild also had an important function in arranging for the supply of gowns and robes to the Chief and his Court, and in ensuring that standards of design and quality for such garments were maintained. Orders from such dignitaries as the Oni of Ife, the Alafin of Oyo and the Emir of Ilorin would be made direct to the chief weaver whose responsibility it was to make sure that all was done properly.¹¹

The guild also has functions similar to those of the craft guilds of medieval Europe. It regulates conditions of apprenticeship, settles disputes between members, and supervises generally conditions of work and quality of production. While possessing no specific powers over individual weavers, the guild can prevent a non-member from setting up a weaving compound. Moreover, it has the right to be informed about any new patterns that are being produced, and the official

names of such patterns must be agreed by the council before they can become general. Here we find the guild in a way maintaining a sort of copyright structure, protecting the individual weaver who may have devised a new design. The guild, as a whole, acts as a kind of repository for information about all patterns and craft practices.

The guilds in other Yoruba weaving towns are very similar to that in Iseyin. In Ilorin the chief weaver is called *Yaya Kalu*. The Ilorin guild holds an annual festival at the time of *Idri-Kabiri*, when a ewe, a ram and a cow are killed, and when the Imam blesses the weavers and offers prayers for the prosperity of the craft. On an occasion such as this the guild members will wear a special cloth, *ikomojeda*, a kind of uniform emphasizing mutual solidarity of the membership.

Since the narrow strip horizontal loom in Yorubaland, as elsewhere in West Africa, is traditionally a male preserve, one would expect membership of these guilds to be confined to men only; and such is the general rule. In 1979 an interesting exception, however, came to light in Akure where a woman weaver has been admitted to the local guild. The woman in question was originally working on the woman's upright loom; but, finding this unprofitable, she decided to switch to the male horizontal loom. This transfer appears to have been accepted by her male colleagues. This is certainly an extremely rare event. Whether it indicates a trend it would be hard at present to say.



26 The typical corrugated roofs of a Yoruba family weaving business in Iseyin. Here nine looms are in work, all sharing the same communal bench. Such large compounds are a common sight in Iseyin.

Selling and markets

There is no fixed price. Weavers and customers bargain strongly. A major reduction in price, however, would be frowned upon by the guild as a threat to the whole craft. Much of the trade is carried out on the basis of individual orders. Sometimes, if special yarns or exceptional outlays are involved, a deposit is required. Should a particular order require the services of many weavers it may be subcontracted to other compounds; this happens frequently in the case of a bulk order (*aso ebi*) calling for large quantities of cloth (*aso oke*) all of the same pattern for group or association functions. For such orders a commission will be paid by all the weavers to the person who arranged the order. Many weavers will give extended credit to customers for special cloths for weddings and funerals, to be repaid, sometimes over several years. Customary ceremonies of this kind may involve considerable financial burden on families who may run seriously into debt to meet their obligations.¹²

Most weavers carry out two distinct kinds of work. First, they make best quality cloth for special and individual orders. Second, they can produce cloth of inferior quality, woven with cheaper yarns and with the minimum of complexity in patterning, often the work of the younger boys and apprentices, which the senior weaver will send to the market. This bread and butter output may reach the market indirectly by way of a cloth dealer, who may himself be a prosperous weaver. Market women also enter into special arrangements with weavers for this kind of cloth, acquiring an option over a weaver's output. The Yoruba weavers set great store by these contractual arrangements, and their violation is not tolerated. This business of being a cloth middleman is very much regulated and carefully supervised by the guild. In 1978 the Iseyin chief weaver, Alhaji Shitu, told me that of late there had been much concern on the part of the guild concerning new and unknown middlemen who were trying to break into the Iseyin cloth business and thereby disturbing the smooth running of the trade. He said that he had instructed all genuine cloth traders to carry with them a picture of himself (Alhaji Shitu) as an identification, and weavers had been told not to sell to unauthorized dealers.

In Yorubaland there are two types of market system handling cloth. The first is the wholesale market which operates on a seventeen day cycle; the other is the retail market chain which can occur either daily or on

particular market days in particular villages or towns.

The two most important primary wholesale markets for *aso oke* (this being the Yoruba name of male-woven strip cloth and meaning 'cloth from the hinterland' or 'country cloth') are the *Araromi al aso oke* market in the outskirts of Oyo and the *Ede* market just south of Oshogbo. Weavers from Iseyin, Oyo and Ogbomosho supply the *Araromi* market; and cloth from Oshogbo, Ife, Akure and even Ilorin, is sent to the *Ede* market. These two markets occur on different seventeen day cycles so that it is possible for the same traders to attend both of them. From here the *aso oke* is taken to the huge *Oje* cloth market in Ibadan, which operates on a sixteen day cycle.¹³ This serves as a distribution centre to which traders come from great distances to obtain stocks for the vast network of market cycles throughout Yorubaland, of which Yankari market in Lagos and Onitsha market on the Niger are among the most important terminals.

The existence of these wholesale markets does not preclude the weaver from selling elsewhere. It is a marked feature, however, of most weaving towns that one does not see local *aso oke* for sale in the local market unless brought there by retail dealers. Except for private orders, there is little direct contact between weaver and consumer.

In centres like Ilorin (which have a daily cloth market in the Palace area) the retail business is run entirely by market women. They only sell cloths which have been already sewn (as opposed to unsewn strips), and usually of the second quality. The display in Zaria market, however, would only represent a small fraction of the total output of the weavers in that town. Formerly there was a Sunday night cloth market which was an important outlet,¹⁴ but, like so many other night markets in Nigeria, this has now been discontinued. The bulk of the Ilorin cloth output is now wholesaled through the *Ede* market. Considerable quantities of Ilorin cloth, moreover, go north to markets in Nupe as well as to Zaria, Kano and Abuja.

The change in traditional market sites is increasingly common today. For example: the famous cloth market in Iseyin, commented upon by Clarke in his travels of 1855,¹⁵ no longer operates, replaced by the *Araromi al aso oke* in Oyo, much to the annoyance of the Iseyin guild. One cause of this change, no doubt, lies in the development of Nigerian communications in recent times. Oyo lies on the main north-south trunk

27 Yoruba *aso oke* cloth on sale in Ilorin market. This market is completely controlled by women cloth sellers.



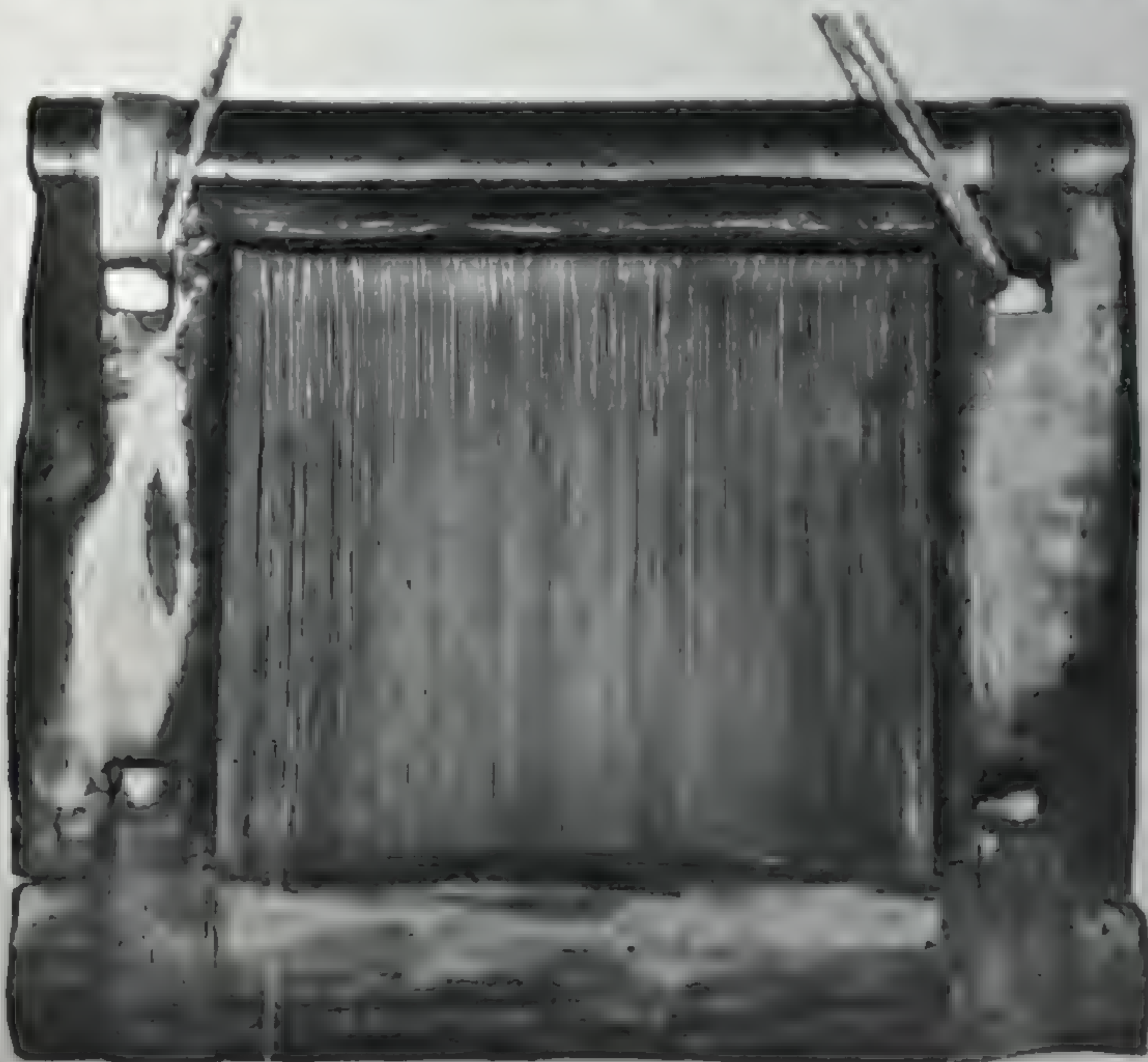
The Yoruba

road, while Iseyin, today, is relatively more difficult to reach than it used to be

The loom

The Yoruba narrow strip horizontal loom occurs in two main forms, one based on poles set in the ground and the other on a carpentered frame. Both forms are fairly characteristic of the general pattern of narrow strip horizontal looms in West Africa, and, at least in the frame form, the Yoruba loom has certain similarities with the loom used by the Asante in Ghana, though this may imply no more than similarities arising from the method of construction. In the pole form the Yoruba loom is very close indeed to that used in the Republic of Benin both by the Court weavers at Abomey and by some northern groups in that country: no doubt we have here a direct expansion of Yoruba influence. In the pole form, the Yoruba loom consists of a warp beam mounted on two forked poles and a breast beam supported in side notches near the tops of two short poles. There is usually but one pair of heddles working through a pulley. The beater is of a form peculiar to the Yoruba and their neighbours in the Republic of Benin. It is of rectangular shape with the side members rather thick, indeed of about the same thickness and width as the bowl and top member; and the frame is bound together in a distinctive manner, the lashings passing through large square holes at both ends of the side members. The design differs from most West African beaters both in the manner of binding and in the fact that elsewhere the bottom member, or bowl, is generally both larger

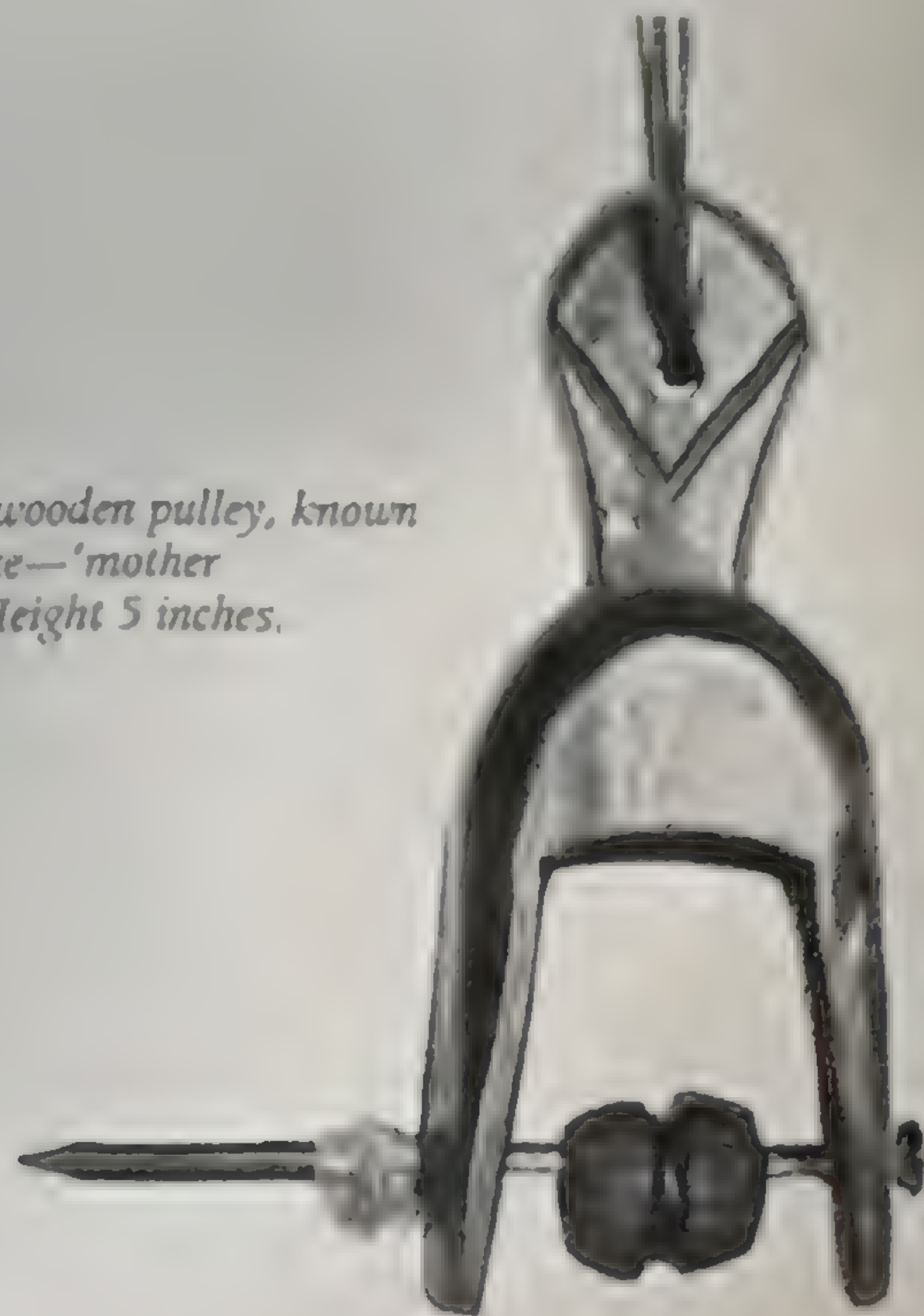
28 Typical Yoruba beater, measuring 9½ inches wide by 8 inches high.



29 View of a typical Yoruba weaving shed. Note the communal mud bench and use of roof rafters to secure the pulleys and beaters. The breast beam supports are incorporated into the mud bench

and heavier than either the side or the top members. The Yoruba also use a characteristic shuttle, of a short and stubby boat shape, again found in neighbouring Republic of Benin. The Yoruba pulley is of wood, often attractively carved and finished, usually in an abstract form which recalls a human head and shoulders. Older

30 A Yoruba wooden pulley, known as the *iya okeke*—'mother of the loom'. Height 5 inches.



pulleys used more representational carvings; but these are now very rare. Beater, pulley and heddles are suspended from a beam in the roof of the weaving shed. The weaver sits upright on a ledge, with the breast beam over his lap. The pair of heddles are worked usually by short pedals, but sometimes toe grips made from discs of calabash are used instead—pedals and discs are today often found in adjacent looms in the same weaving shed. The warp bundle and drag weights in the Yoruba loom are carried on a specially made wooden sledge.

The frame version of the Yoruba loom contains the same forms of pulley, beater and heddles, but their suspension is from the top of a frame made of board which also includes provision for the support of both front beam and cloth beam. A seat for the weaver may also be built into the frame. The frame version is far less common than the pole form; and it is possible that it is only used by Yoruba weavers who have been

31 Use of the Yoruba carpentered frame loom, in which the seat is incorporated into the loom structure. Jos



32

32 Yoruba use of the back to hold the heddle harness, possibly a Nape influence. Ilorin.

33 A Yoruba drag sledge, which acts as a movable platform on which rest the large warp bundle and the heavy drag stones.



33

unable for one reason or another to establish themselves in a permanent weaving shed.

The following are some Yoruba terms for various loom parts:

iyaofo—supports for warp beam

pofi—warp beam

agbonrin—breast beam

iyinso—metal bar for tensioning breast beam

apasa—sword stick

akate ekowu—skein winder



34 Yoruba weaver using supplementary weft threads to work the holes and carry over patterns. Iseyin



35 View of the Yoruba loom, showing how the loom is set up with individual warp threads over the back beam during the preliminary weft winding stage.

36 Yoruba loom showing the use of the iron tension bar, which rests against the mud bench and keeps the breast beams in place.



odada—bobbin carrier frame for warping up
hasa—beater or reed
omun aso ('breast of the cloth')—heddles
iya okeke ('mother of the loom')—pulley
etese—pedals
ali wawa—beam in roof from which are hung
 pulley and heddles
okuku ('turtle')—sledge for drag weights
oko aso—shuttle
akuaro—bobbin

Traditionally among the Yoruba, as elsewhere in West Africa, weavers make their own equipment. The concentration of weavers in such centres as Ilorin, however, has created a demand for specialists in the manufacture, repair and distribution of loom parts. I saw, for example, in the Pakata district of Ilorin, a young man riding a bicycle loaded with newly made beaters and shuttles and with a box over the rear wheel filled with old and damaged beaters which, he said, he had collected for repair. He told me that while his father had been a weaver, his family on the whole had specialized in the business of loom part manufacture and had sufficient work to keep them busy.

Warps, warping up and yarns

The Yoruba loom is generally set up for the manufacture of a strip of cloth about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, made up of a total of some 324 warp threads (or 72 threads to the inch). If hand spun, the warp thread is usually single strand; but if machine spun yarn is used, it can be twisted from two or more strands. The weft threads are usually thicker than the warp threads; and the weft pick is in the region of 32 passes per inch.

Warping up in Yorubaland follows a pattern found elsewhere throughout much of West Africa. The warps are laid out on the ground, wound between iron pegs. The length of the warp is determined both by the time involved to weave a certain length of strip and the quantity of strip needed to make up a garment or set of garments. A woman's set of two body wrappers, head wrapper and, perhaps, baby wrapper, can take up to seventy-two yards of warp, according to measurements which we made in Ogbomosho. In Iseyin we were told that a weaver could make up to fifteen yards of strip in a day.

The work of warping up is usually carried out by young boys and apprentices on behalf of established weavers who pay piece work rates for the task.

37 The Yoruba use of the large bobbin carrier, the *odada*. Iseyin.



Involved are winding yarn on to the skein winder (*akate ekowu*), which among the Yoruba usually takes the form of something like an inverted conical basket rotating on a stick supported by a beer bottle, transferring it to bobbins mounted on the bobbin carrier frame (*odada*) with up to sixteen bobbins, and walking with the bobbin carrier frame to stretch the thread out along the pattern set out by iron stakes in



38 The Yoruba method of warping up on the ground, Iseyin

the ground. When stretched out on the ground, usually to a total length of seventy-two yards composed of four rows of eighteen yards each (though other lengths and numbers of rows are possible), the warp is carefully wound into an elliptical bundle ready for mounting on the dragstone sledge (*okuku*). The free end of the warp is then threaded up on to the loom, often by tying new warp threads to the remnants of the previous warp which have been left running through heddles and beater. This, again, is a task usually entrusted to apprentices.

The traditional yarn for both warp and weft in Yoruba weaving is hand spun, locally grown cotton,

spun and dyed by women. Spinning and dyeing are still important auxiliary crafts to weaving in Yorubaland. Several women may work together in special sheds in a compound, dyeing both hand spun yarn and factory made yarn with indigo, as well as kola for yellow, camwood for red, a dye from mango bark for beige, *Vitex grandifolia* for black, a dye called *eledu* for a biscuit brown in imitation of *sanyan* silk (see below), and many others.¹⁶

Today, for the bulk of the Yoruba production, factory yarns have replaced hand spun. Apart from machine spun cotton, the Yoruba weavers have been much attracted to a variety of synthetic fibres including shiny yarns of the metallic lurex type (*siliki*) which of late have wrought a profound change in the general appearance of *aso oke*, giving to it a dramatic sparkle which, while perhaps not entirely to the taste of the traditionalist, has certainly attracted fashion-conscious consumers. The colour arrangements and emphases of these glittering threads change rapidly with fashion, presenting problems to the suppliers of these yarns to meet the changes in demand. Yarns which glitter, indeed, have almost become a trademark of modern Yoruba weaving which has moved far from the place of origin in Nigeria. In 1977, for example, we found a number of stalls selling a variety of Yoruba *aso oke* as far away as Banjul in the Gambia.



39 Girl spinning local cotton in Iseyin. This fine thread is still much in demand for traditional cloths.



40 Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.



41 Beving collection 1934, British Museum, London.



42 Adams collection 1900, British Museum, London.



43 Adams collection 1900, British Museum, London.

Group of Yoruba cloths known as *gandere*, woven in Ilorin. They all contain strips of blue and white check cotton intersewn with strips of red alharini silk and elaborate silk inlay designs.



44 Fine old Yoruba ikat (waka) cloth, featuring a complex pattern of vertical and diagonal stripes in shades of red, blue, green, and white. Ikat, Ilorin collection, British Museum.



45 Modern Yoruba ikat (waka) cloth from Ilorin.



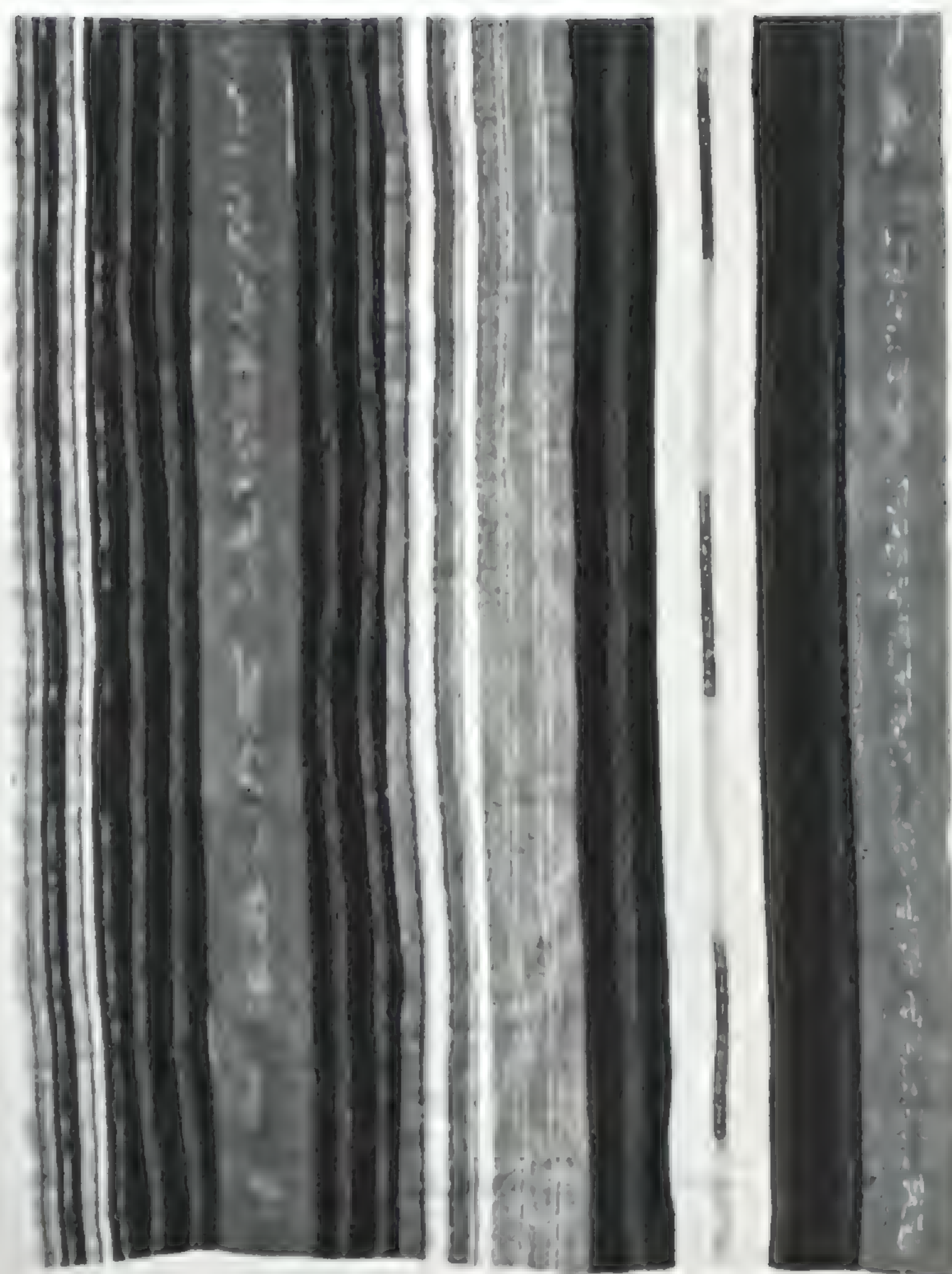
46 Section of a large man's aso ibora cloth, featuring a pattern of vertical stripes in shades of blue, red, and black. This pattern is called akara and contains 24 stripes of hand spun cotton and warps. Ilorin.



47 An extremely fine woman's oparo marriage cloth, from Ilorin, containing the six individual strips of oparo pattern necessary to make up an oparo eleto cloth.

Another distinctive feature of Yoruba weaving is the use of natural Nigerian wild silk, known as *sanyan* in Yoruba and *tsamiya* in Hausa. There are two main varieties of wild silk in Nigeria, that from the *Anaphe infracta* moth and that from *Anaphe moloneyi*. *Infracta*, the cocoons of which occur in clusters contained within a brown silk pod, is the preferred source of silk for Yoruba weaving. *Moloneyi*, with whitish cocoon clusters unprotected by an outer case, provides a thread much used by the Yoruba for embroidery, particularly in Ilorin, and is also so used by the Nupe, the Hausa and the Kanuri in Borno. Both species are to be found in the savannah of northern Nigeria, particularly in the Tamarind tree, but also in Doka,¹⁷ Baure and Markarfo trees. The Tamarind, however, not only provides the best quality silk but also, via the Hausa name for that tree, the word *tsamiya* which the Yoruba have adopted as *sanyan*.

One source of *sanyan* for the Yoruba is provided by Bororo Fulani herdsmen who collect cocoons while travelling with their cattle southwards through the savannah and bring them to market in the villages through which they pass, whence the cocoons are



49 Typical Yoruba plain aso oke warp striped cloth, showing some use of the glitter siliki warp threads

48



48 The wild silk cocoon of the *Anaphe infracta* moth. The natural brown silk is yielded from the rough outer casing, after it has been boiled to soften it. The interior of the cocoon is discarded. Size: 6 inches across.

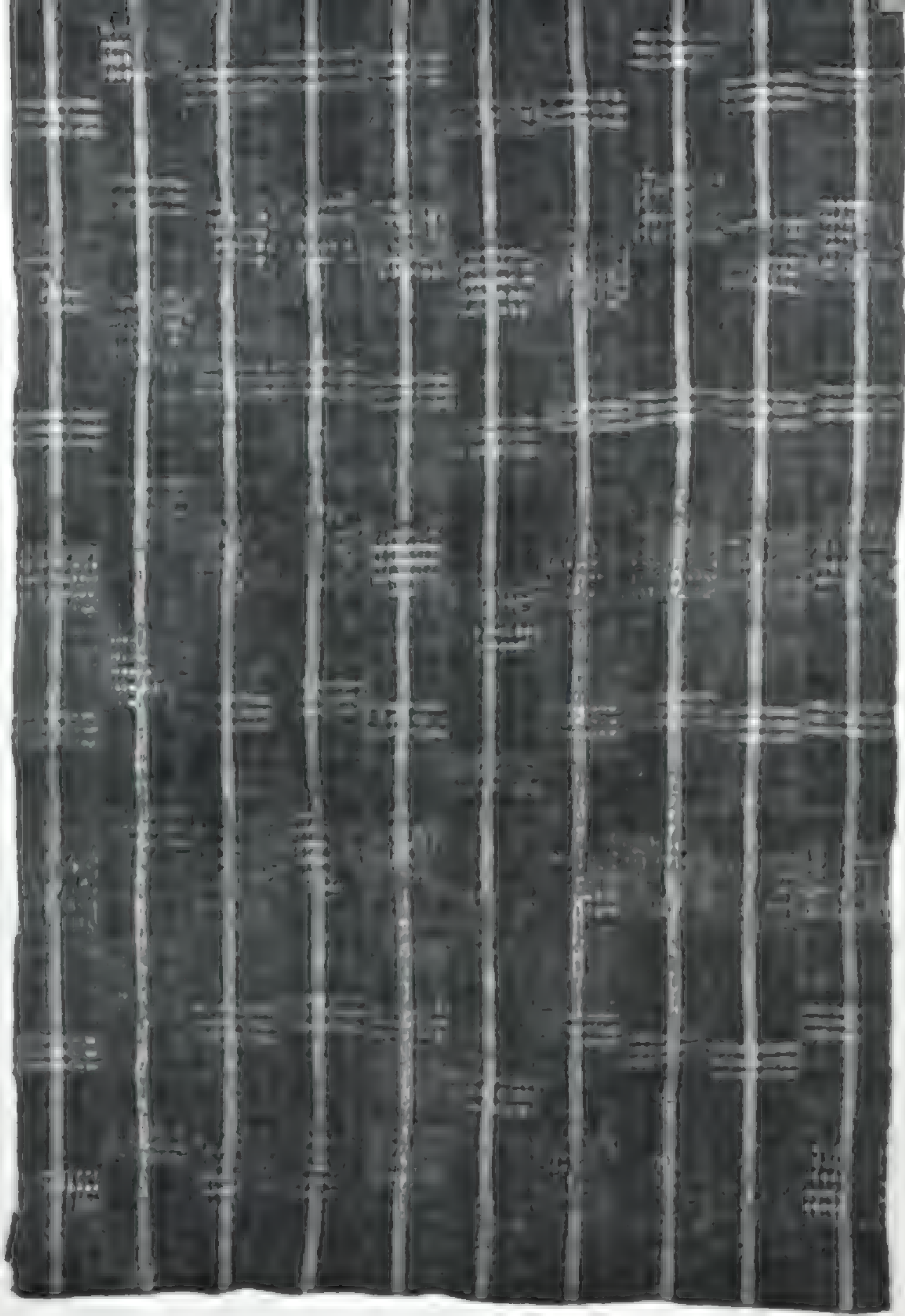
50 A cluster of cocoons from the *Anaphe moloneyi* moth. The white silk yarn is spun direct from the cocoons.



50

traded to major yarn centres such as Kano, Zaria and Bida.¹⁸ Here they can be purchased by Yoruba traders.

Some Yoruba women specialize in the spinning of *sanyan*, though this craft is very much on the decline. Iseyin, once a major centre of *sanyan* spinning, now produces very little indeed; some *sanyan* is still produced in Ilorin though, on the whole, by older women. One Ilorin *sanyan* spinner, some seventy years old, told me in 1978 that she obtained her cocoons from a sister living in Kano. Her yarn was from *moloneyi*,



51 Natural brown sanyan aso oke cloth, using silk from the *infracta* cocoon. Ilorin

that is of the type mainly used for embroidery, and capable of being spun directly from the cocoon to produce a silk of a beige colour but rather lighter in shade than the thread from *infracta*.

It is possible that Akure is one of the few important *infracta* sanyan weaving centres remaining today.¹⁹ Here the silk is derived not from the cocoon but from the outer casing, a roughly heart-shaped pod which may measure as much as five inches in diameter. The pod is boiled in an alkaline solution to separate the silk from the gum. After drying, the silk is first carded and then spun just as cotton is spun. Unlike the thread of the better known *Bombyx* silkworm (of the Mediterranean and the Far East), *Anaphe* silk is too fragile to be drawn as a single fibre. The spinning process yields a fibre which is thicker and rougher than that of *Bombyx* silk, but also a fibre of great strength and resistance to rot. The yarn is usually woven undyed so that its natural brownish shades are characteristic of a cloth used for expensive and important gowns and robes. Sanyan cloth, however, like other silks, takes dye quite well, particularly when treated with an alum mordant.

It is by no means rare to find sanyan dyed indigo blue or magenta red, the last colour obtained from camwood (*Pterocarpus tinctorius*).²⁰ Sanyan, being far more costly than cotton, is often used only in the warp, the weft being supplied by a thick brown cotton which looks something like sanyan but lacks its characteristic texture and feel. Garments entirely from sanyan are, of course, still woven, generally in Akure or Ilorin; but they are certainly no common market products. Specialist sanyan dealers exist: we encountered one, for example, in Ibadan. Large men's robes of sanyan today would certainly have to be made as a special order and would be extremely expensive. In some markets one can find old sanyan robes on sale; but they are neither common nor cheap.

Apart from sanyan, the Yoruba weave with yet another variety of silk, as do weavers in several other parts of Nigeria. This is a bright magenta yarn known as *alharini*. It comes from Tunisia, where it is a waste material, originally a by-product of the ancient North African silk industry which probably dates back to the sixth century AD;²¹ though in more recent times European silk industries, such as that in Lyons, have been a major source of *alharini* via North Africa. *Alharini* has been, since at least the eleventh century, a feature of the trans-Saharan caravan trade, being carried from Tripoli and Ghadames to Kano.²² It has long been attractive south of the Sahara because of the lack of good red dyes in West Africa. Its existence was noted by Al-Bakri.²³ In 1788 Simon Lucas, who was sent to Tripoli on behalf of the African Association, observed it to be an important item of export from the Fezzan to Katsina.²⁴ Clapperton, in 1825, found *alharini* on sale in markets in both Katsina and subsequently at Kulfo market in Nigeria to which Yoruba traders were coming specially to buy it at a rate of 3000 cowries an ounce.²⁵ The Yorubas mixed *alharini* with cotton to make cloths which were being exported out of Yorubaland into Dahomey. Indeed, in the 1820s both in Yorubaland and in Dahomey *alharini* was so important as to be the objective of military operations.²⁶ Barth, in 1852, found *alharini* at Jega in Kebbi, within easy reach of Yoruba markets.²⁷

Today *alharini* serves two main functions in the Yoruba weaving repertoire. First, it still appears in Ilorin cloths as bright magenta inlays which are part of a design known as *gandere* (of which more later on in this chapter). This is a traditional design well represented in European museum collections. Second, *alharini* is used to line the more elaborate gowns, most frequently along the hem and around the sleeves. For

this purpose it is woven in both Bida and Ilorin into special strips which serve no other function.

Enquiries in 1978 and 1979 revealed that *alharini* was becoming rather difficult to obtain. A weaver in Keffi told me that he could only find *alharini*, and then in but small quantities, in Lagos whither he had to make a special journey to get the yarn. This scarcity has inspired an enterprising Senegalese company to manufacture an imitation, marketed under the misleading name of *alharini*;²⁸ and it may well be that soon the false *alharini* will have displaced entirely the traditional yarn with such a long history in the textile trade of West Africa.

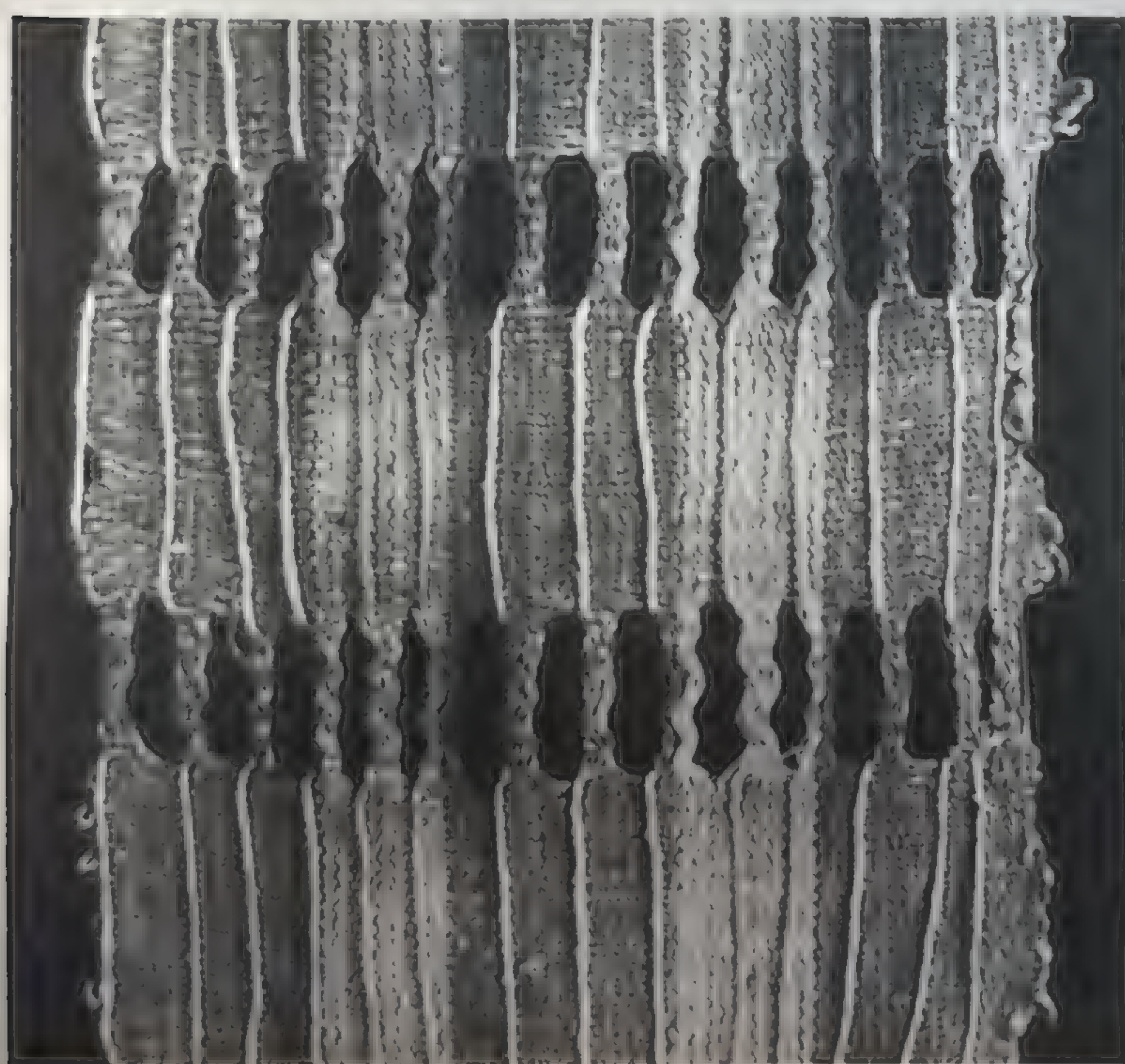
Patterns

The basic ground pattern in Yoruba weaving, achieved by warp colour alignments, is very similar to that used by, for example, the Nupe in Nigeria, the Fon in the Republic of Benin, the Ewe and Asante in Ghana and the Mossi in Upper Volta; and, like these other peoples, the Yoruba tend to use the background pattern as the basis for the naming of cloths. Some of the older warp striped patterns of basic colours from these various groups are very hard to distinguish one from the other. The Yoruba, however, use three main methods of patterning which serve to distinguish their weaving easily enough from that of other peoples. These are: the use of holes; the use of inlay floats which appear on one side only of the fabric; and the distinctive use of *ikat*.

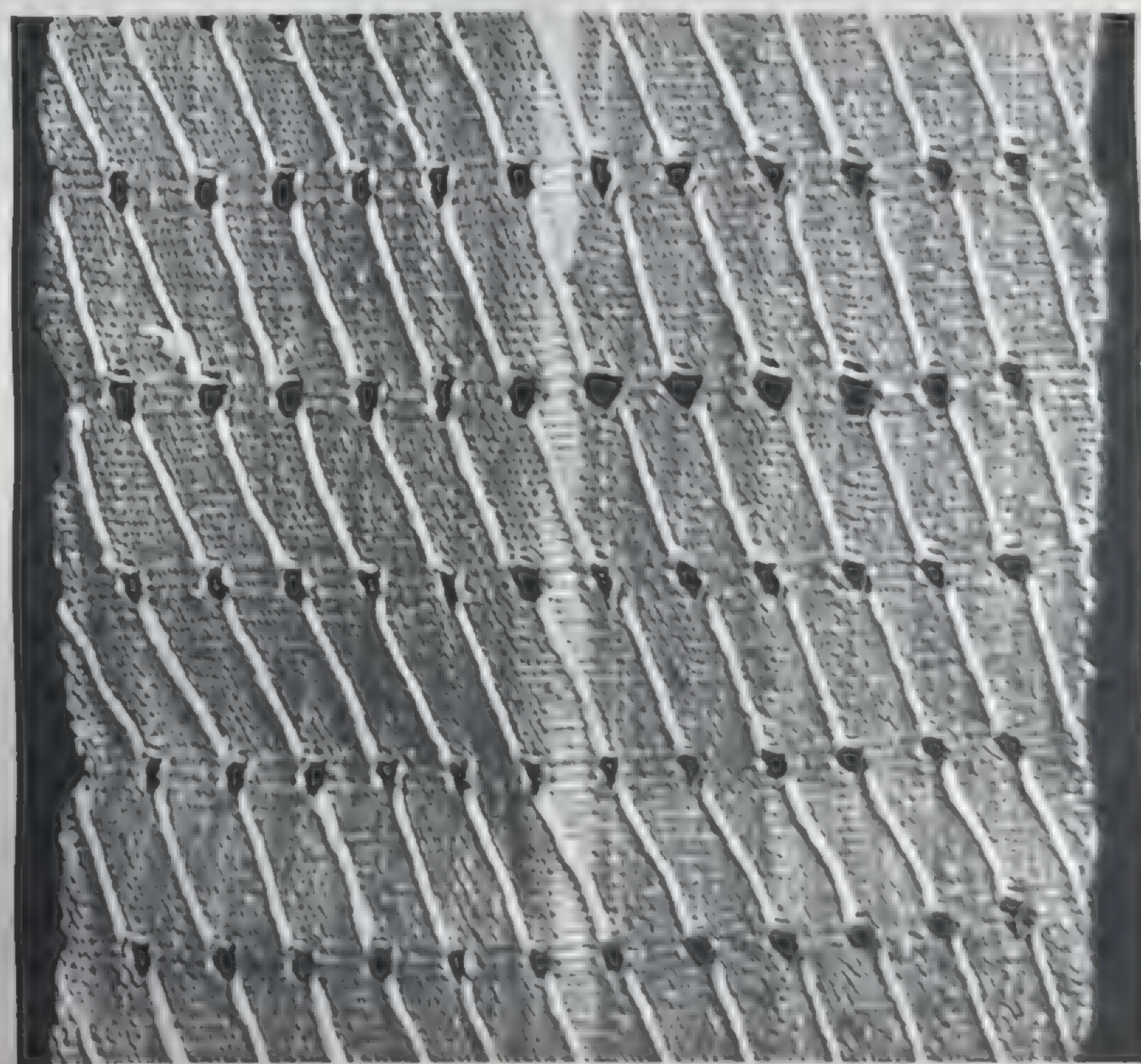


53 Supplementary wefts being used for carry over patterns. Jo

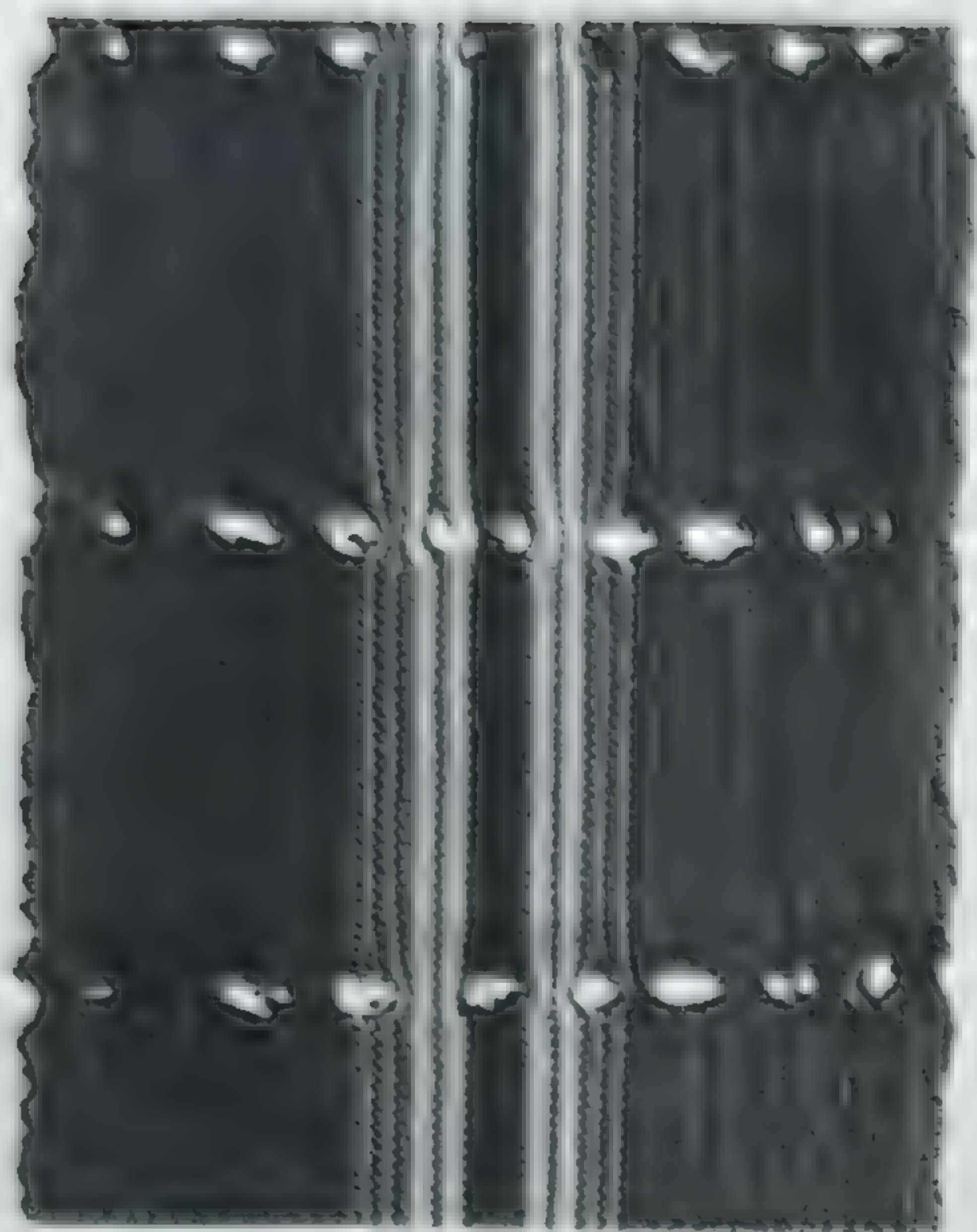
Holes, known as *aso eleya*, or, in Ilorin, *oniho*, as decoration clearly involve a technique of considerable antiquity. The cloths collected in 1841 at Egga (or Eggan) by Allen and Thompson and now in the British Museum include several examples of this genre.²⁹ The holes are usually made by gathering together groups of warp threads, say twenty or so, and weaving them together with separate wefts so as to create discontinuities between the various groups. These discontinuities are, in fact, slits; but by virtue of the tightening effect of the short wefts each group of warps is pulled in to yield what amounts to an oval space or hole between it and adjacent groups. The short wefts involved in this method can either be cut off when the holes in any one row are completed, or they can be left



52 Large holes with vertical carry over threads, using sanyan silk.



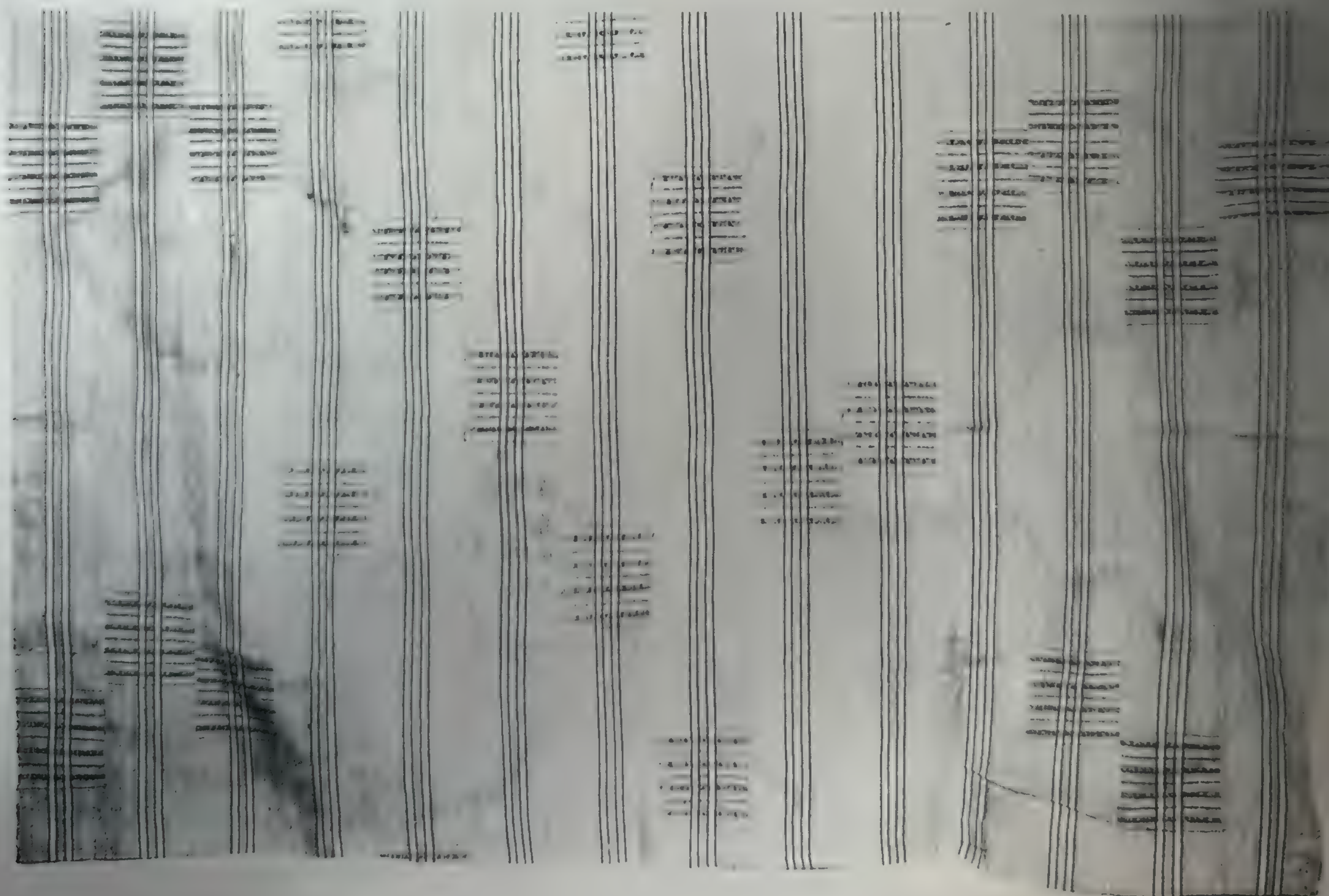
54 Yoruba diagonal carry over and hole patterns. Hand spun cotton.



55 Punch-type holes on Yoruba cloth, showing pinching of wefts to form the holes

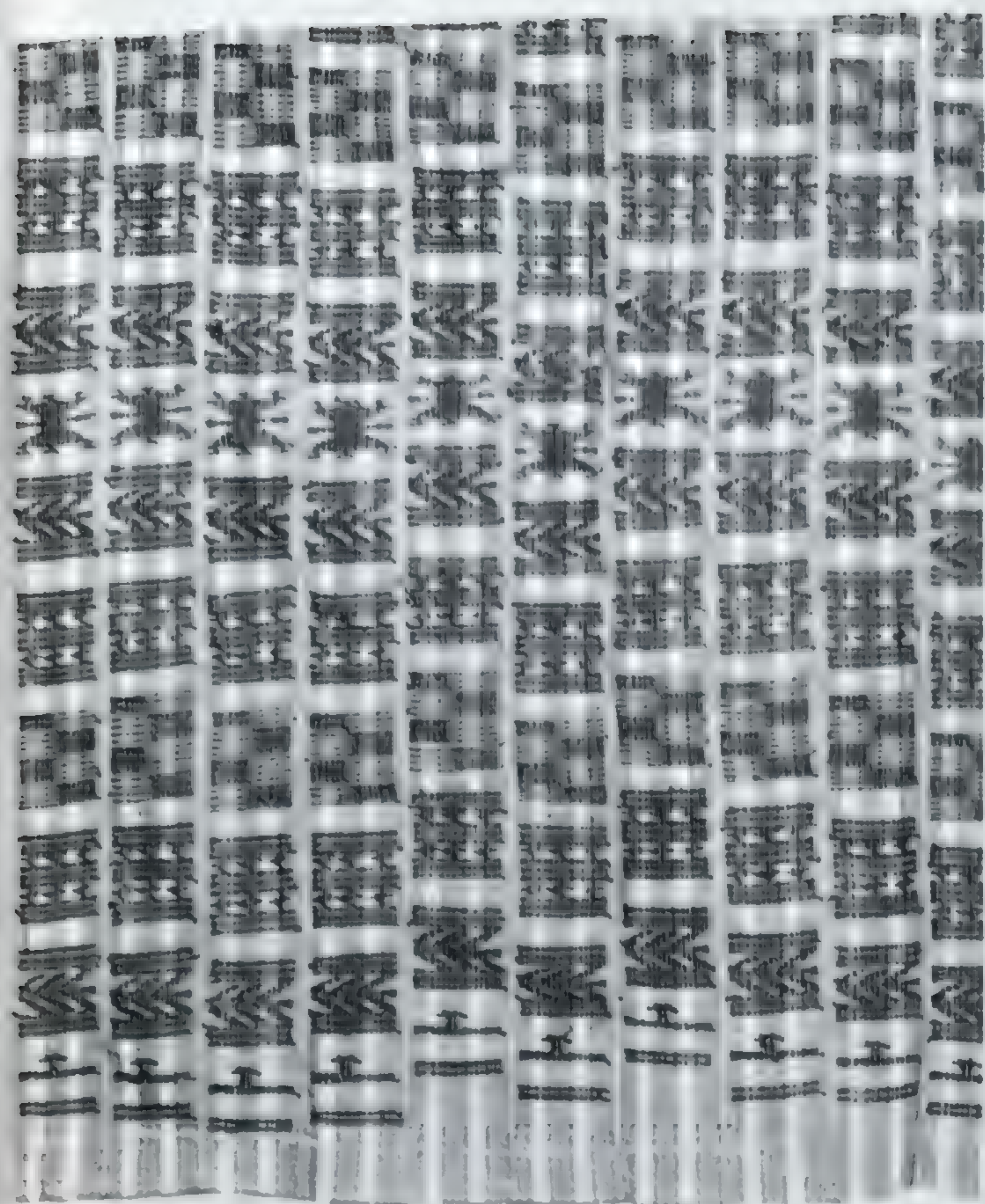
hanging to be carried over for the next row of holes. If this latter method is adopted, the effect is to cover the surface of the cloth, between the rows of holes, with loose weft threads either running parallel with the warp or at an angle across the line of the warp. The

56 Yoruba *aso oke* cloth, showing scattered groups of holes in a sanyan brown ground with a pale blue warp stripe. Ilorin.



carry-over method of decoration, which, of course only shows on one side of the cloth, is called in Yoruba *onjawa*. When used with shiny lurex type thread (*siliki*), *onjawa* cloths, always with the carry-over worn facing outwards, are particularly dramatic in their over all effect.

The *onjawa* method of making holes is time-consuming and, hence, expensive. A cheaper method is simply to push rows of holes into the cloth strip with a device something like a very coarse or blunt comb. This is a somewhat brutal technique, and from a technical point of view rather crude. In making holes in this way great care must be taken not to damage either the warp or the weft threads; and after use over a long period the effect of the holes will tend to disappear as the threads move back towards their original positions.³⁰ The cloths in the Egga collection, dating from 1841, do not appear to have examples of this particular method of making *aso eleya* while they do show some *onjawa* decorated cloths: it may be, therefore, that the pushed hole technique is of comparatively recent origin.



57 Yoruba use of intensive supplementary weft inlay float in *aso oke* cloth.

58 Older *aso oke* cloth showing inlay designs from Ilorin—green and yellow. Beving collection 1934, British Museum, London.



58

The second distinctive Yoruba characteristic design is the use of float inlays. The inlay pattern is only attached to the main web of the ground weave on every twentieth warp thread. The effect is that of evenly spaced lines running warpwise through the pattern; and the weft inlay threads appear so infrequently on the reverse side of the cloth as to reveal their presence by no more than a widely spaced grid of dots. In most other regions of West Africa where the narrow strip weaving complex makes use of inlay patterns, the inlay is incorporated as part of the main fabric so that it can be seen in full on both sides of the cloth. The one-sided inlay appears to be very much a Yoruba fancy, appearing not only in the men's weave but also in cloths produced by women on the vertical loom. There is some evidence to suggest that the technique is fairly recent in origin, even in Ilorin where its presence today is particularly marked. In the Egga cloths in the British Museum there are no such inlays in cloths which, on other grounds, could well be given an Ilorin origin. It is perhaps of significance that *aso alaro* cloths (see page 46), used for funerals, weddings and other traditional ceremonies, do not

contain these inlays. Moreover, in the Yoruba system of cloth naming the emphasis is on the background weave and not on the inlay designs. The origin of this single-faced Yoruba inlay must, at present, remain an open question.

The third Yoruba characteristic is the use of warp *ikat*, that is to say the use of bunches of warp threads which have been tie-dyed to give a subtle alternation of light and shade. In southern Yorubaland *ikat* is known as *alabe*, while in Ilorin it is called *waka*. Warp *ikat* occurs elsewhere in West Africa. It is characteristic of Baulé weaving in the Ivory Coast, for example; and it is to be found in Ewe cloths, particularly older examples. Warp *ikat*, moreover, is found in many regions outside West Africa, in Syria, the Yemen, Turkestan in central Asia, many parts of southeast Asia and elsewhere.³¹ It is possible that the technique of warp *ikat* reached Yorubaland from some source external to Nigeria, perhaps from the Arabian peninsula by land along the *Haj* route or, even, by sea from southeast Asia. Here, again, one can only speculate. It is interesting that the technique is used both in men's and women's weaving; and the fact that it occurs in cloths of ceremonial significance to the Yoruba may suggest that the use of the technique in Yorubaland is of some antiquity.



59 Modern use of ikat designs in Yoruba *aso oke* Ilorin

Classification of Yoruba cloths

Yoruba cloths can be divided into three major categories: cloths of prestige value; cloths used for rites and ceremonies; and cloths worn for daily use.

In the first category there are again three major groups: *sanyan*; *etu*; and *alaari*. *Sanyan*, the 'King of Cloths', is of naturally coloured beige *Anaphe* silk, though it may have a white central warp band in each strip. It is particularly associated with special robes for Chiefs and Obas. Weavers in Ife showed us in 1978 a special *sanyan* pattern called *sanyan ajawu* which was traditionally reserved for the use of the Oni of Ife, and Alhaji Shitu, the chief weaver of Iseyin, showed us a magnificent *sanyan* robe which he wore on official occasions. While today the correlation of rank and dress has been much weakened, the cost of *sanyan* effectively ensures that it is still very much the preserve of persons of substance.

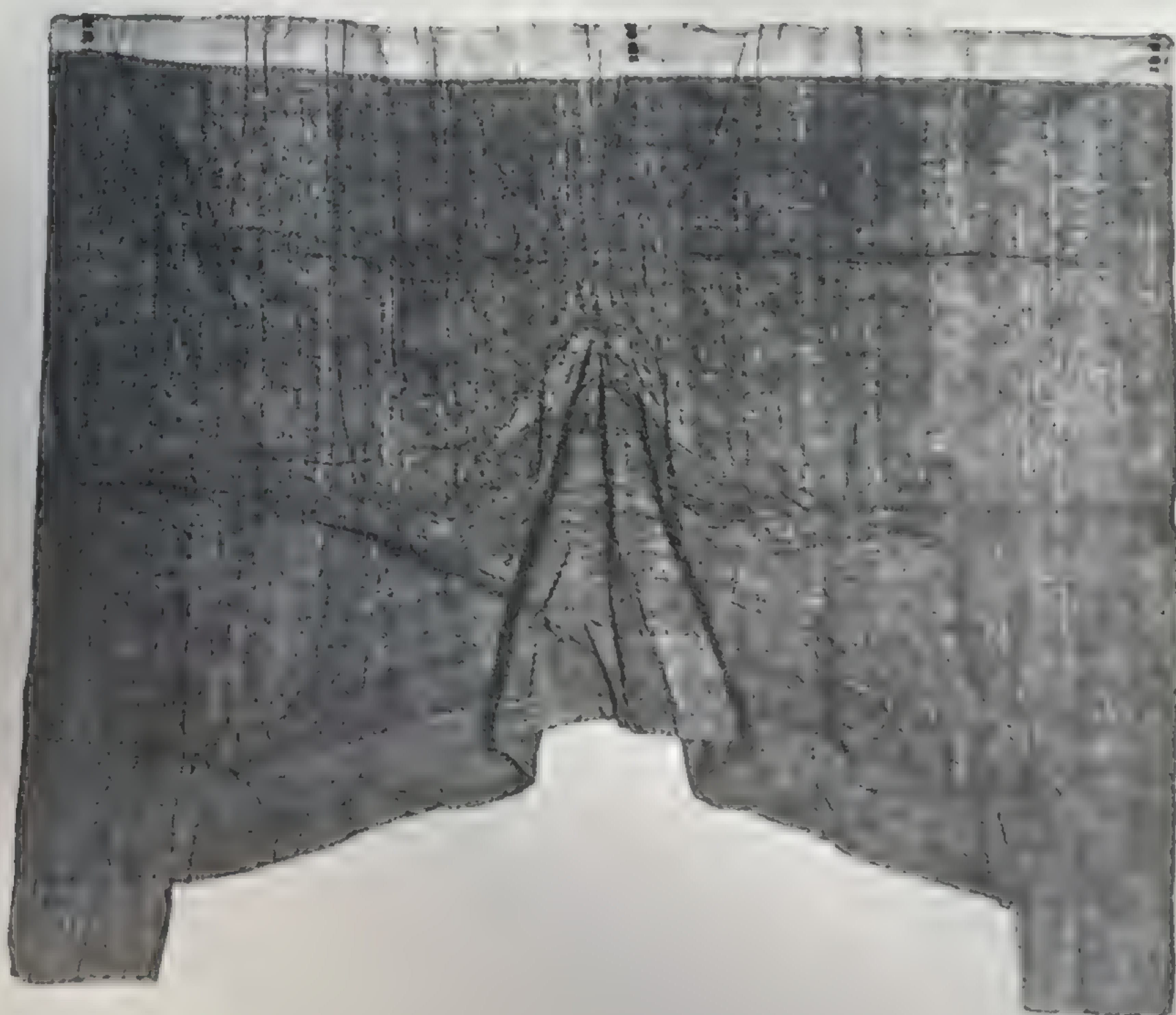
The second category is *etu*, and particularly the variety often called 'senior' *etu*. This is also worn by the Nupe, who call it *sabu*, and the Hausa, who call it *saki*. The design is a small check of light blue on a dark indigo background, a pattern widely known as the 'Guineafowl' design. At one time *etu* contained a considerable proportion of *sanyan* silk, but today it is usually all cotton, hand spun, very carefully dyed and generally only available on special order. Robes of this form part of many traditional ceremonies and functions; and their wearing definitely implies status. The cloth is deemed particularly suitable for wear at funerals. Good *etu* robes are well represented in the collections of many major European museums.

The third category of prestige cloth is *alaari*. Originally made from a mixture of red camwood-dyed *sanyan* and *alharini*, more modern examples may be cotton with an admixture of *sanyan* and, perhaps, *alharini*. We have obtained samples of this material containing red *sanyan* from the chief weaver of Iseyin and from weavers in Oyo and Ife. The name *alaari*, meaning according to Abraham (in his Yoruba dictionary) 'a type of reddish, dyed cloth', would seem to have been derived from the Arabic word *harir*, meaning 'silk'. Today, however, one can find *alaari* type cloths which are all cotton.

As a material for garments for Chiefs in Yorubaland and elsewhere in southern Nigeria *alaari* cloth has an ancient history. Oral tradition relates that Ewuare, in



60 A fine Yoruba pure silk sanyan agbada, probably woven around 1930. Shows some Nupe influence in embroidery designs. British Museum, London.



61 Yoruba trousers in etu blue and white weave. Two inch strips. From the Egga Collection of 1841 in the British Museum.



62 A Yoruba style gbariye with *aleenu* woven in *etu*. Shows fine *pako* design embroidery. This was collected by Talbot in 1932. Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.

1472, was the first Oba of Benin to introduce scarlet clothes to the Court.³² In the third decade of the nineteenth century Richard Lander described the king of Katunga as being 'richly dressed in a scarlet robe and a pair of trousers made of country cloth, scarlet ground with a blue stripe'. A Yoruba poem, translated by Chief Ayorinde, praises Oluyole, who was Basorun of Ibadan in 1847, as 'a man who used scarlet to outshine the erstwhile well-dressed man on horseback'.³³ The Arabic origin of the name *alaari*, moreover, suggests very strongly the roots of this use of cloth in the pre-European trans-Saharan trade.

One use of *alaari* would seem to be by Chiefs when being visited in their homes. The Aseyin of Iseyin, when I called on him in 1978, told me that he always wore *alaari* dress when in his Palace; and, indeed, he was so attired when he gave me an audience. He added that when he went out to visit or to attend official functions and ceremonies he would wear robes of *sanyan* and *etu* rather than *alaari*. From this and other evidence it would seem that these three prestige cloths,

sanyan, *etu* and *alaari*, have retained their position in Yoruba society for a very long time. Weavers with whom we discussed the matter all agreed that they attached the greatest importance to the continued production of these 'great' cloths.

The second major category of Yoruba cloths, those used for rites and ceremonies, are the *aso alaro* group of cloths. These are made from hand spun cotton which has been dyed dark blue with indigo with, perhaps, *ikat* warp patterns in varying blue shades and, in the case of marriage cloths, some red warps as well. *Alaro* cloths have neither holes nor inlay patterns. They are often beaten to give them a glossy appearance. The ends are usually finished with tassels and there may be some braiding along the border. Certain weavers specialize in *alaro* designs. *Alaro* cloths are hand sewn, usually by the family which has acquired them for one of its ceremonies.

63 A large Yoruba agbada with the bat-like wing sleeves, of the *new alaari* group. This agbada forms one of a set of three (the other two being a *gbariye* and *dandogo* in the same pattern). Iseyin.





14. An illuminated manuscript from the 15th century, showing a page from the 'Book of Hours' of Charles V, King of France. The page is decorated with a central column of gold-leaf motifs, including clouds and flowers, and a red and white striped border. The binding is made of red and white striped fabric.

One use of *alamo* cloth is to be seen in the engagement ritual where the prospective groom or his family is required to give the bride-to-be at least three cloths, known as *oparo* cloths, which are made up from a selection of *aso alaro* patterns. Ideally, five patterns should figure in such a combination, *okun*, *alikinla*, *jija*, *eleku* and *patugie*. When strips of these patterns are sewn together in this particular order, they make up a marriage cloth known as *oparo eleto*. For about a month after the wedding the bride will be seen out and about wearing this most attractive of cloths.



65 An interesting gbariye sewn from strips of Ilorin cloth which contain inlay patterns in the form of writing. Omu-Aran, near Ilorin.

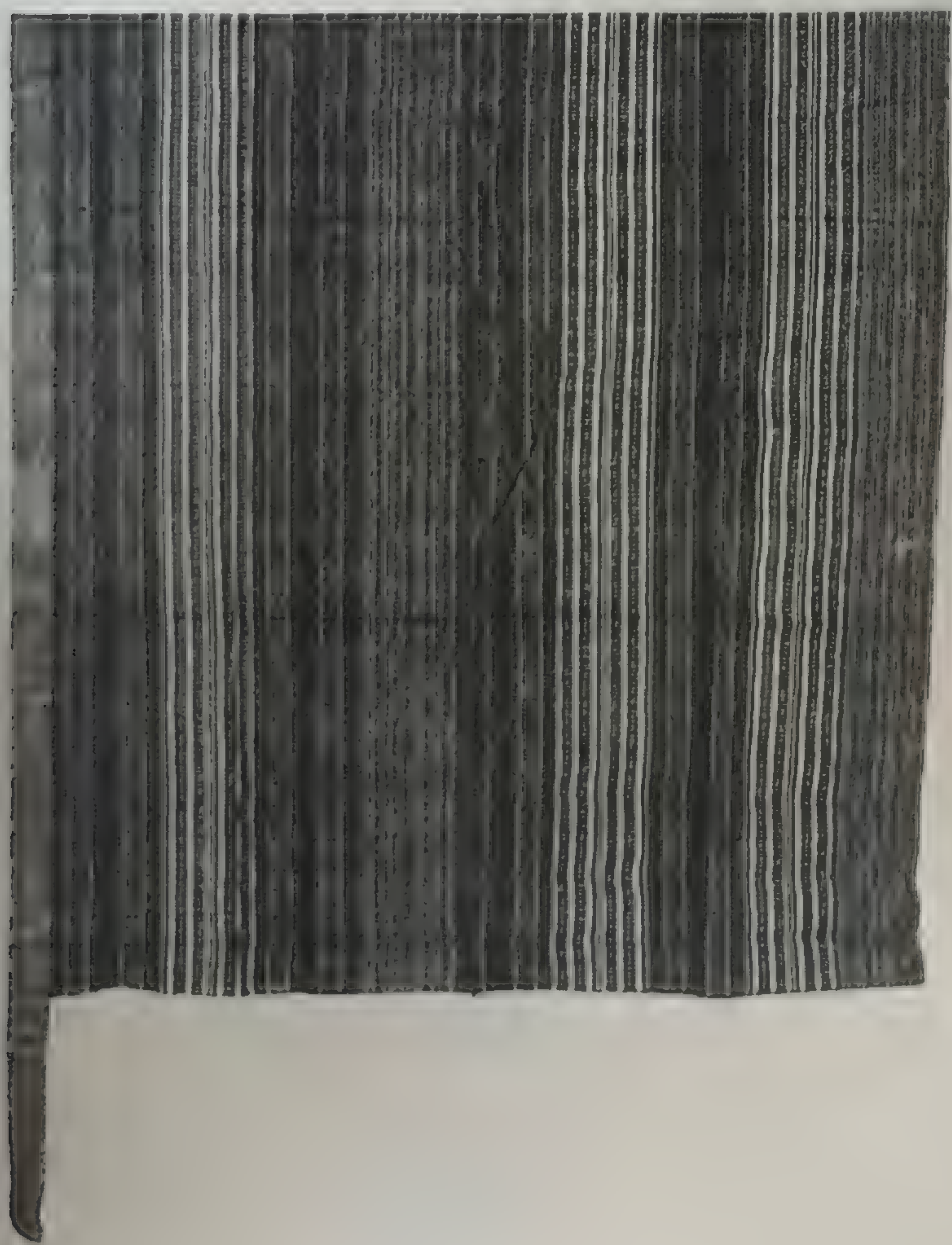
A bridegroom will also wear an *aso alaro* at the wedding ceremonies. The male cloth is a large garment worn like a toga, and is known as *aso ibora*. One weaver from Ilorin, from which town I derived most of my information on *oparo* cloths, showed me an *aso ibora* which he had woven for his own marriage, twenty-four strips of an *ikat* design called *koko eleckom*. Other designs which I saw were *akarigba* and *oyin orega*. These cloths are usually worn in the manner which was observed as long ago as the 1820s by Clapperton in Katunga, where he found it Court etiquette to appear 'in a loose cloth, tied under one arm, part over the shoulder and hanging down to the feet in a graceful manner'.³⁴ In the southern parts of Yorubaland the *aso ibora* can also be worn over a tailored gown, in which case it is draped, roughly folded, over the left shoulder.

Cloths of the general *aso alaro* category are also involved in age-set ceremonies, to which great importance is attached in the Ilorin, Oyo and Ekiti regions. Weavers' age-sets in Ilorin, so I was informed, are *omolere* for the eighteen to thirty group, *ifelodun* for the thirty to forty-five group, *agba tobow* for Elders, and *oloye* for Chiefs. Today these ceremonies permit a great variety of patterns and considerable departures from the strict *aso alaro* traditions. The cloths, however, are worn by men in the traditional *aso ibora* manner; and, in any age-set gathering, even if novel patterns are accepted, all of that set will be wearing the same pattern.

Funerals provide another occasion for the wearing of *aso alaro* cloths. Here, of course, *etu* is also used. At all events, dark blue is the correct colour for both men and women. As Ellis noted, during a period of mourning 'women must cover the head with a cloth of a dark blue colour'.³⁵

The third major category concerns cloths worn for daily use or for social gatherings which lie outside the scope of the major ceremonies and rituals. The Yoruba are much given to participating in what might be called purely social clubs at the meetings of which dress of the *aso ebi* style might be worn, that is to say that all present wear the same pattern on any particular occasion. As Fadipe puts it: 'while the belle in western countries is somewhat mortified on finding that her select costume is duplicated in a crowd, the positive self feeling of the Yoruba is actually enhanced by having scores of her fellows dressed alike'.³⁶ For such occasions, as well as for individual use, the Yoruba have a wide range of patterns from which to choose. In

66 A very fine woman's *aso oke* wrapper woven with red silk *sanyan* and blue cotton yarns, showing some hidden weft design. Collected by Allen and Thompson from Egga market in 1841. It came from Kilamani Kinimi, on the Niger. British Museum, London.



the cloth markets of Ibadan and Lagos in 1978 I counted at least 150 distinct patterns; and no doubt there were many more available which escaped my notice.

Fashion is constantly calling into existence new patterns; and patterns, both old and new, are covered by an elaborate system of names. Some are named after leading figures of the political world: in Ilorin in 1979 we found both a Murtala Mohammed and an Obasanjo pattern. Others are named after proverbs and sayings: *natesun*—‘elephant’s skin, don’t sleep with it’; *ere wolede*—‘good follows me’; *mabayomije*—‘don’t spoil my peace’; *alaari iomomayoyo*—‘many designs for children’. Yet others have names chosen by the weaver, often for reasons which he alone understands: *ireke*—‘sugar’; *shafata*—‘green’; *oni wala*—‘today’s pattern’; and names meaning, for example, ‘keep right’ (for a pattern in Ogbomosho) and ‘cold money’.

Some Yoruba patterns actually name themselves, in that included in the inlay design are words, even whole sentences. Others contain representational

67 A fine *aso alaro* cloth worn by a senior weaver, outside a weaving shed in Ilorin.



68 Market women in Ilorin display a red *aso oke* set with glitter inlay, called *alaari iomomayoyo*.

pictures, animals, fish, crustaceans, birds and the like. The use of letters would seem to be a fairly recent innovation. At least, we have been unable to find any examples in older cloths of known date from museum collections outside Nigeria. The representational designs used to be quite common, particularly in Ilorin cloths, but now seem to be rather rare: we found very few examples in our fieldwork during 1978 and 1979. These literary and pictorial elements in Yoruba weaving are of great interest in that they are by no means characteristic of the West African narrow strip weaving complex as a whole where, possibly because of the influence of Islam, design tends to be abstract. Pictures of animals used to be common in the designs of the Djerma of Niger; but are no longer so. They occasionally are to be found among various weavers in the Ivory Coast and they are a feature of the Court weavers of the old Dahomey capital at Abomey where they echo the appliqué tradition.³⁷ They are very common in the weaving of the Manjaca and Papel in Guinea-Bissau and Senegal; but here we certainly have a strong European influence leading to pictures of steam ships and even to portraits of Heads of State. The use of cloth as a literary medium is even rarer. We have seen odd examples from Mali; but only among the Ewe of Ghana and Togo could this be said to be at all

common. These elements in Yoruba weaving are good illustrations of the great degree of initiative and imagination shown in a craft which, at the same time, has powerful traditional roots.

Many Yoruba cloths are made up of an alternation of two distinct and contrasting strip designs. In the Egga cloths in the British Museum there are some excellent examples of this arrangement where the effect is that of an alternation of light and dark warp patterns. Possibly of more recent date are cloths in which a dark strip, often of an *etu*-like pattern, is alternated with a lighter strip carrying a sequence of inlay patterns. The effect can be dramatic, and in the Nigerian context seems to be characteristically Yoruba though we have seen something like it from the Ewe of Ghana and Togo. The most costly cloths of this genre are those of the *gandere* variety using an inlay of magenta *alharini* silk. *Gandere*, strictly speaking, is a background pattern of blue and white check; and the inlays are known as *wala*. This type of cloth, while more commonly used by women, can also be made up into male gowns. In 1978 a dealer in Ilorin who specialized in *gandere* showed me a photograph of himself arrayed in such a garment.

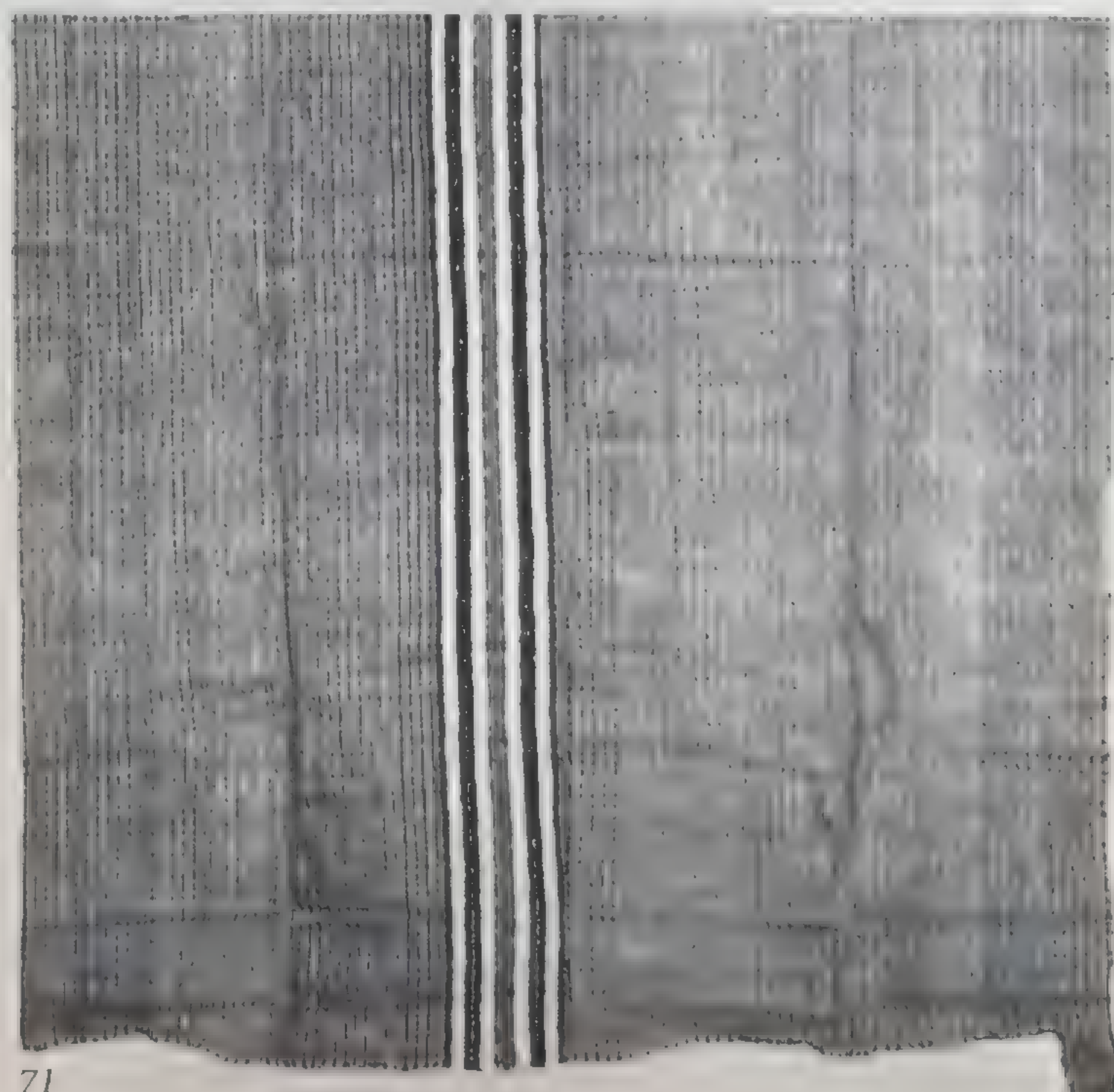
60



70 A young mother in Owo today carries her child covered by a blue and white cotton cloth very similar to illustration 71.

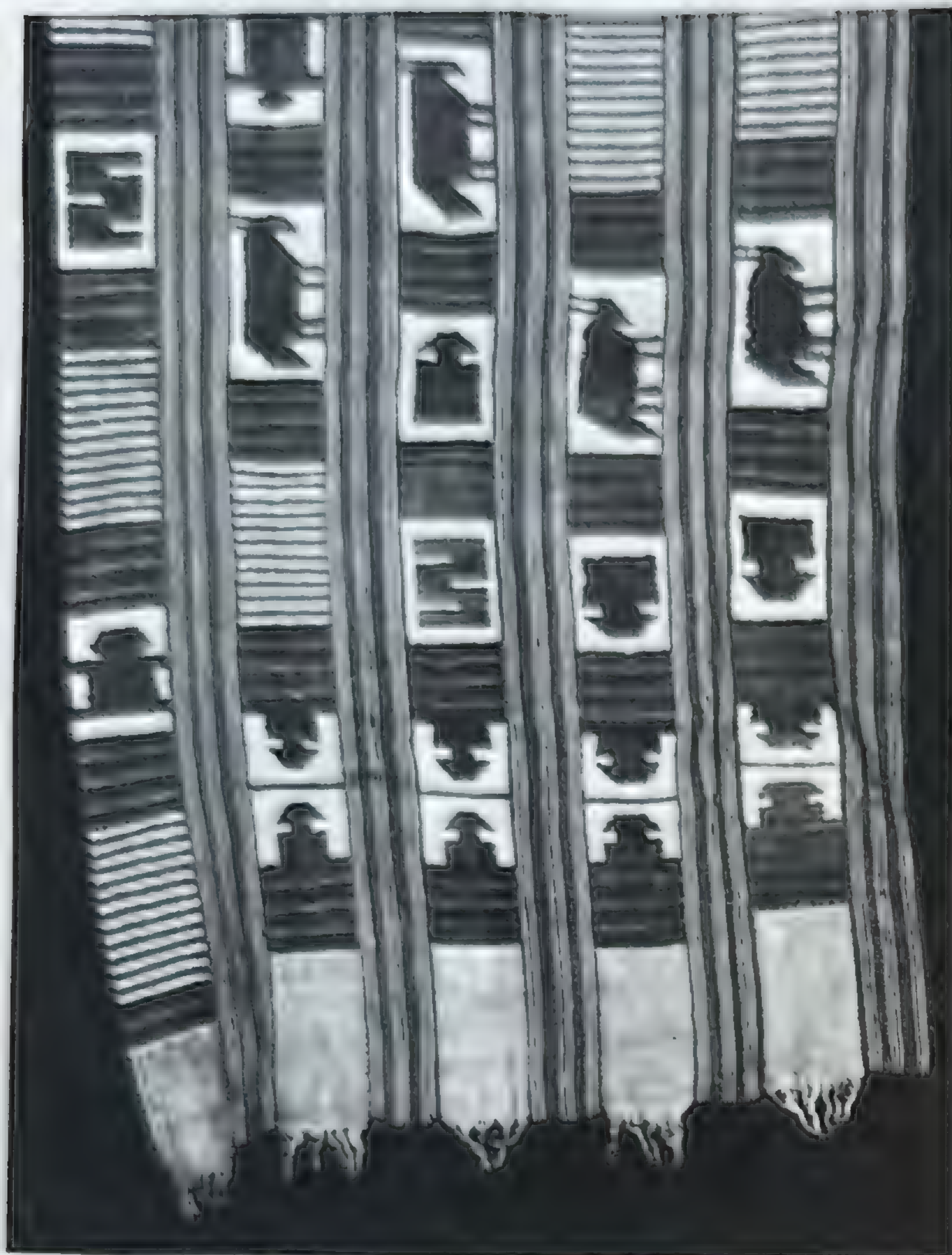
69 Yoruba inlay motifs showing letters and words worked into the *aso oke* design. Some contain messages and sayings. This cloth is called *mabayomije*—'Don't spoil my peace'. Ilorin.

71 An old check *gandere* type Yoruba *aso oke* collected in Egga in 1841. British Museum, London.



71

53



72

Yoruba cloth in use

Some uses of Yoruba cloth have already been referred to above. This section is intended to describe the major categories of garments made from the product of the Yoruba man's narrow strip horizontal loom and to touch on some ritual uses of that cloth not already described.

After weaving, for whatever purpose intended, the cloth strips must be subjected to further processes. To make up a usable cloth they must be sewn, a difficult operation requiring great skill if the strips are to lie flat one beside the other, and if, where there are designs—be they holes, inlay or *ikat*—they are to match up correctly. Traditionally, sewing is done by hand; and it is still so done in the better quality cloths. The sewing machine, however, has taken over in all but the most costly or special varieties; and market cloths are often marred by poor quality sewing by machine. For some purposes the sewn cloth needs to be embroidered. Here, again, a hand process has in many cases been replaced by machine to produce a result

73 Yoruba cloth from Ilorin, with interesting animal motifs. Dressing collection 1944, British Museum, London.

74 These type and design stripes of plain warp strip alternating with dense inlay designs. This type of cloth is known as *aso oke*.



73

which, if cheaper, is certainly less attractive. Good cloth after sewing may also be beaten to give it a smooth texture and a density of colour not obtainable by any other means. Once more, cost often leads to the omission of this step.



74 The best *aso oke* is often beaten and carefully folded during the process. Ilorin.

The traditional woman's dress from *aso oke* consists of three matching pieces, the waist wrapper, *iro*, usually of twelve to sixteen strips and a little over two yards in length, the top wrapper, *iborun*, of eight strips and the same length, and the head tie, *gele*, of four to sixteen strips and again of the same length, worn as an elaborately wound and folded turban. *Aso oke* for women's use is usually sold in the market in complete sets of three. These sets can provide one of the most dramatic of female garments to be found anywhere in the world.

The traditional male dress, in the best qualities made from *sanyan*, *etu* or *alaari*, can consist of a full set of no less than six garments: four robes, *dansiki*, *gbariye*, *dandogo* and *agbada*, a pair of wide-waisted trousers, *sokoto an ehenula*, and a hat, *ikori* (or *fila*). The four robes worn ensemble can be both hot and heavy. Often the *gbariye* and *dandogo* alone are worn along with the hat, *ikori*. Important people, Chiefs, Elders and the like, do, however, possess the complete set even though they may not often wear the whole lot together.

75 Woman wearing *aso oke* set of *iro*, *iborun* and *gele*. Ilorin.



76 Yoruba male dress set consisting of *gbariye*, *sokoto an ehenula*, and *ikori*.

The *agbada* is a wide and heavy robe essentially similar to the northern *riga* of the Hausa, Nupe and Fulbe. The *gbariye* and *dandogo* are peculiarly Yoruba (but with close parallels to garments worn by the Fon in the Republic of Benin). Though similar in form, both being wide-skirted fluted smocks, the *dandogo* is larger and heavier than the *gbariye*, and has large sleeves which the *gbariye* lacks. Both gowns are decorated with the same embroidered patterns, an array of Yoruba knot motifs (*pako*), in the best gowns eleven on the front and one on the back. The *pako* motif, literally 'chewing stick', also appears in much other Yoruba decoration, on wooden doors, drums, votive bowls, calabashes and, even, on the crowns of Obas. Both *dandogo* and *gbariye* gowns have round neck openings and both have, on the front, a pair of slit-like openings which are relics of the days when such garments were worn on horseback and provision had to be made to enable the wearer to hold the reins. Often, today, the vestigial nature of these holes is indicated by the fact that they lead to nothing but pockets, opening only to the exterior of the garment. The embroidery on these garments, traditionally, is of *Anaphe* silk; and it is



77 The Chief Asishana Amure wearing his dandogo set, in Igara

carried out by skilled craftsmen known as *junkan* in Iseyin and *enetota gafia* in Ilorin. It is a costly business. The embroidery can add literally hundreds of naira to the cost of a good quality gown. It is not surprising, therefore, that cheaper garments are embroidered by machine using imported silk or synthetic yarns. The *dansiki* is the smallest of those garments which might, perhaps, be classified as being members of the *gbariye* family. It is a fairly short sleeveless smock more like a vest than anything else. Smocks of this sort, but each with its characteristic variations, can be found all over West Africa.

The *agbada* is essentially like the northern *riga* and, as such, will be discussed later on. It too carries complex embroidery consisting of a circular motif with or without a spiral arm extending from it on both back and the right hand front, called the *agbala*; and, on the left hand front a decorated pocket, *ajufun*, with motifs which belong to the northern Nigerian repertoire.

The *dandogo* and *gbariye*, as well as a number of similar robes which are not discussed here, may well be of specifically Yoruba origin, perhaps derived in the first instance from war smocks, *aso gun*, which, heavily

decorated with all sorts of amulets and protective charms, were once the campaigning uniform of the Yoruba warriors, and which have their parallels, perhaps of Yoruba inspiration, in neighbouring West African regions such as Ghana and Upper Volta. Certainly Yoruba-style robes are appreciated today far away from Yorubaland. We saw in 1979 an excellent *dandogo* among the garments preserved in the Palace in Maiduguri; and in 1969 we obtained another such robe from a Mossi chief in Upper Volta. At present it is not easy to say much more about either the origins or the distribution of these garments. This is a subject which certainly cries out for further research.

In the past it is certain that cloth was as important to the Yoruba after death as in life in that it played a major role in burial practices; and to some degree this is still true. Both nineteenth century and contemporary observers have recorded the emphasis placed on cloth in Yoruba funerals. Apart from the use of *alero* cloths, which has already been commented upon, one should note the custom of burying the deceased along with cloths of quality, as shrouds and as covers and accoutrements for the funeral bed and the actual burial. There exists among the Yoruba, as, indeed, among almost all weaving groups in Nigeria, a plain white hand spun cotton strip woven expressly for funerary purposes, either as the basic material for shrouds or as bands with which the body can be



78 A Yoruba embroiderer in Iseyin

prior to burial. The Yoruba version of this cloth, which we found being woven in Iseyin, is known as *owu eko*. More elaborate cloths are also used. Bascom has noted, for example, that bodies in Yorubaland have been buried with no less than eighty cloths; and he observes that even the poorest families will try to obtain at least four cloths for this purpose.³⁸ Without further invading the privacy of Nigerian burial custom it is important to note that the role of the local cloth in burials among the Yoruba, as among other groups in Nigeria, may go a long way to explain the survival of the narrow-strip horizontal loom weaving industry in the face of competition from imported or local factory-made cloth of greater width. The roots of *aso oke* and other such cloths lie deep in Nigerian tradition; and it will surely require something more than economy and expediency to eradicate them completely.

Notes

- ¹ B. W. Hodder and U. I. Ukwu, *Markets in West Africa*, Ibadan 1969, p. 95.
- ² Personal communication from Ife weavers in 1978.
- ³ P. Lloyd, 'Craft Organisation in Yoruba Towns', *Africa*, 123, 1953. Lloyd states that in 1953 Iwo had 200 weavers, Shaki 50, and Ado 10. In 1979 we found only 12 weavers in Ido-Ekiti and 3 in Ado-Ekiti.
- ⁴ Personal observation in 1979.
- ⁵ Personal observation in 1979.
- ⁶ Personal observation (J. Holmes) in 1979.
- ⁷ Personal observation in 1978.
- ⁸ G. B. Dodwell, 'Iseyin, the Town of Weavers', *Nigeria Magazine*, 1955.
- ⁹ For a general account of Yoruba customs, see: N. A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, Ibadan 1970.
- ¹⁰ Lloyd, loc. cit.
- ¹¹ Personal communication from the chief weavers in Iseyin and Ilorin in 1978.
- ¹² Fadipe, op. cit., p. 166.
- ¹³ Hodder, op. cit., p. 96.
- ¹⁴ D. Forde, *The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of South-western Nigeria*, London 1969, p. 76.
- ¹⁵ W. H. Clarke, *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland 1854-1858*, Ibadan 1972, p. 44.
- ¹⁶ Personal communication from Madam Elesá of Ilorin in 1978. Her method for making *sanyan* brown is as follows. The white cotton yarns are steeped in a mordant made from a mud-like substance called *eledu*, derived from the casts of a species of worm. They are then boiled for twenty hours in a solution of a wood called *epoidi* and alum. The whole process is called *Omibioghono*. The colour appears after oxidization from sun drying the yarns.
For Yoruba dyeing methods generally, see: O. L. Oke, 'The Chemistry and General History of Dyeing', in J. Barbour & D. Simmonds, eds., *Adire Cloth in Nigeria*, Ibadan 1971.
- ¹⁷ O. Temple, *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria*, Lagos 1922, p. 413. Temple records that *Anaphe* silk was particularly common in the Ningi region of Bauchi State. The *Doke* tree (*Berlinia paniculata*) is common in the Bauchi and Gombe region.
When we visited Ningi in January 1979 we could find no evidence of a silk industry still flourishing. We are grateful to the Emir of Ningi for making enquiries into this question on our behalf.
- ¹⁸ For an early account of silk from the Tamarind tree, see: W. Wallace, 'Notes on a Journey through Sokoto Empire and Borgu', *Geographical Journal*, VIII, 1896.
- ¹⁹ Personal observation (J. Holmes) in 1979. For an account of the process of *sanyan* preparation, see: J. Chunwike Ene, 'Indigenous silk weaving in Nigeria', *Nigeria Magazine*, 81, 1964.
- ²⁰ Personal communication from Madam Elesá of Iseyin, 1978.
- ²¹ See, for example: R. B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, Beirut 1972, p. 180.
- ²² E. W. Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, London 1968, pp. 144-53.
- ²³ W. Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives*, London 1960, p. 67.
- ²⁴ T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee*, London 1824, p. 332.
- ²⁵ H. Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo*, London 1829, pp. 53, 137.
- ²⁶ R.C.C. Law, 'Traditional History', in S. O. Biobaku, ed., *Sources of Yoruba History*, Oxford 1973, p. 38.
- ²⁷ H. Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, Vol. II, London 1857, p. 136.
- ²⁸ In 1979 Mrs J. Holmes obtained specimens of this pseudo-*alharini* in Ado-Ekiti.
- ²⁹ We must thank John Picton for enabling us to open some of the bundles of cloth collected at Egga in 1841 which have ever since rested in a wrapped condition in the store of the British Museum (Museum of Mankind). The collection contains much Yoruba material; and it must be one of the major sources of information about the actual products of Yoruba weavers in the first half of the nineteenth century.
For a survey of the literature relating to the Egga material, see: Marion Johnson, 'Cloth on the Banks of the Niger', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, VI, 1973.
The expedition which produced the Egga collection is described in: W. Allen & T. R. H. Thomson, *A Narrative of an Expedition sent . . . to the River Niger in 1841 under the command of Captain H. D. Trotter*, 2 vols, London 1848.
- ³⁰ The Yoruba use of two kinds of holes in weaving has been discussed by Kate Kent in an excellent article entitled 'West African Decorative Weaving' in *African Arts*, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1972. She distinguishes between real holes, woven, and 'false holes' made with a comb-like implement.
See, also: J. B. Eicher, *Nigerian Handcrafted Textiles*, Ile-Ife 1976, p. 67.
- ³¹ See, for the history of *ikat*: A. Bühler, *Ikat, Batik, Plangi*, 3 vols., Basel 1972; R. J. Moser, *Die Ikattechnik in Aleppo*, Basel 1974; L. Langeweis, and F. Wagner, *Decorative Art in Indonesian Textiles*, Amsterdam 1964.
- ³² Quoted in: Hodgkin, op. cit., p. 87.
- ³³ A. J. Ayorinde, 'Oriki', in Biobaku, op. cit., p. 65.
- ³⁴ Clapperton, op. cit., p. 47.
- ³⁵ A. B. Ellis, *The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa*, London 1890, p. 156.
- ³⁶ Fadipe, op. cit., p. 79.
- ³⁷ For illustrations of looms in the Republic of Benin, which used to be Dahomey, see: K. Kent, *Introducing West African Cloth*, Denver 1971, p. 40; R. Gardi, *Unter afrikaischen Handwerkern*, Bern 1969, pp. 195, 198; Anon (Editions Delroisse), *Dahomey*, Paris & Cotonou n.d., pp. 102, 103.
- ³⁸ W. Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, New York 1969, p. 67.

The Nupe and some of their neighbours

This chapter is concerned with the weaving of the Nupe and of a number of groups which either have some relationship to the Nupe or occupy regions adjacent to the Nupe heartland. In this category, apart from the Nupe proper, I have included the settled Nupe of Keffi, the Eloi of Nasarawa, the Gbari of Abuja, and the Bunu and Aworo of the south bank of the Niger near Eggan.

Nupe proper, according to Nadel, can be defined as the region to the east of the Kontagora river which is bounded on the south by the Niger river as far as Budon and including towns and villages on the south bank of that river along the stretch between Eggan and Jebba; on the north by a line more or less between Leaba and Kataeregi;¹ and on the east we noted during our fieldwork in 1978-9 a rather less clearly defined limit with Nupe influence stretching to the Abuja area where some Nupe sub-groups can be found, and to Keffi and Doma which today have many Nupe settlers.

The Eloi occupy scattered villages south of Nasarawa and extending towards Udeni. The Gbari are a numerous group who occupy all the country in an arc around Abuja. The Bunu and Aworo live on the south bank of the Niger between Kabba and Eggan and spread westwards as far as Insanlu.

The centre of Nupe culture today is in and around Bida; but Nupe has been famous for its textiles long before the foundation of Bida in 1857.² The earliest centres of Nupe weaving can be identified with Tabra and Kulfo, near the southern branch of the Kontagora river. Later the emphasis of the craft moved to Rabbah and Eggan, whence cloth was sent down the Niger by boat and headload overland to Kano and Borno. Early accounts leave us with the impression that long before the founding of Bida many thousands of Nupe people

were involved in the textile trade, and that Nupe was then perhaps the most important producer of prestige gowns in Nigeria. Barth, who saw much Nupe production in Kano in the 1850s, was certainly of the opinion that the best gowns came from the products of Nupe looms.³

Today the number of Nupe male weavers has much declined. Our own fieldwork in Nupe in 1978 and 1979 supported this conclusion. We had some difficulty in finding as many as fifty men weavers actually at work in Bida town, and less than a dozen each in Kutigi and Sakpe. The largest concentration of Nupe weavers at present at work would seem to be in Keffi and Doma towns where Nupe settled about a century ago.

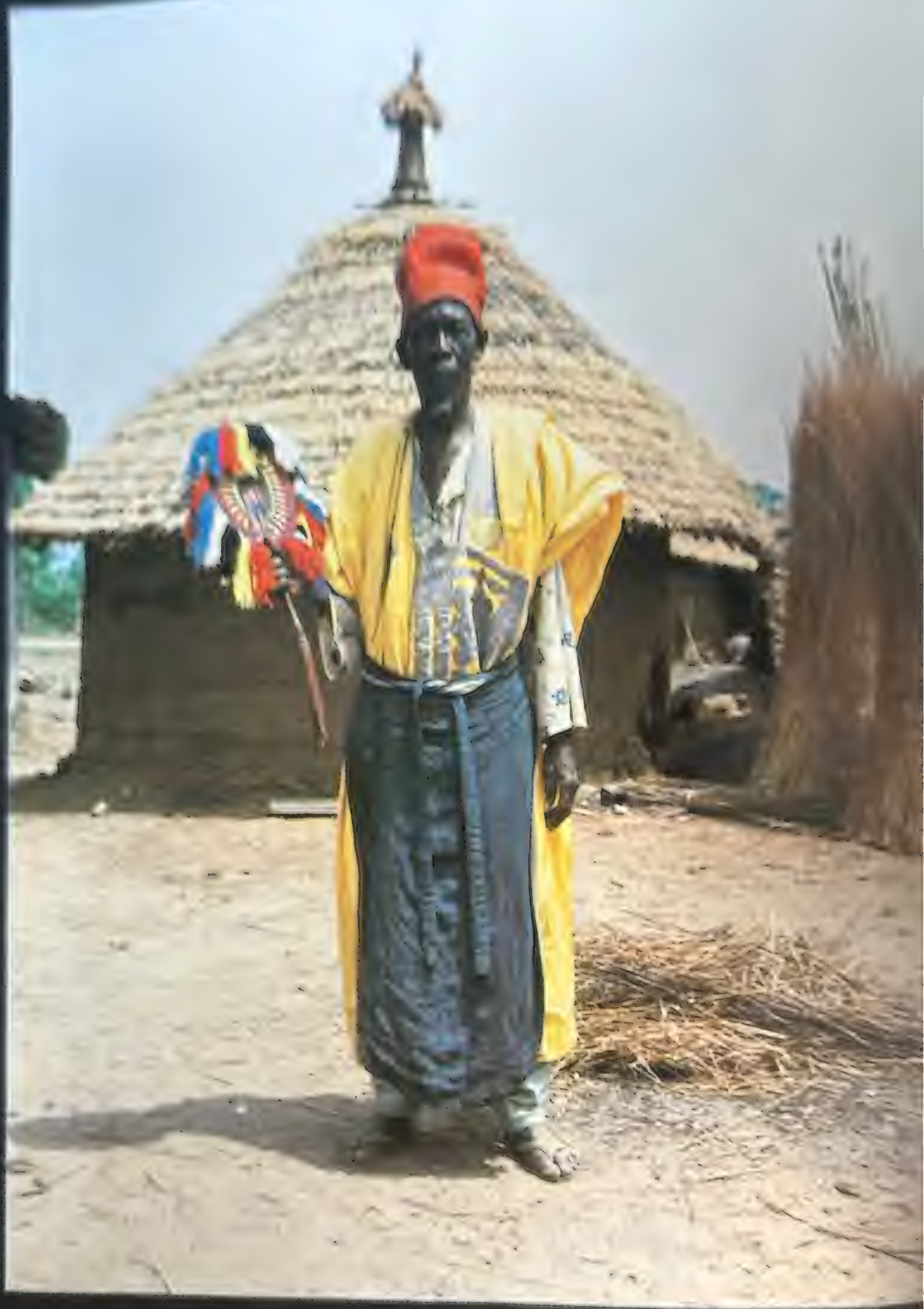
The weavers of Nupe extraction in Keffi probably provide us with the best impression of what Nupe cloth must have been like in the last century. These weavers now supply cloth to southern Tiv and Idoma markets, a trade of considerable antiquity which gives the Nupe an eastward influence far greater than one might at first suspect.

The Eloi are a weaving group whose output, perhaps because of their proximity to Nupe weavers in Keffi, shows Nupe influences. Today they either weave for their own domestic purposes or, more rarely, to meet demand from the local Gbari.

The Gbari and the Bunu have been included here not because they have any particular cultural relationship with the Nupe but because, geographically, they fall within the fringes of the Nupe world. The Gbari themselves, in fact, do not appear to weave, but they make special and distinctive use of certain cloths

79 Detail of a large red silk Nupe robe of the *egbawo* pattern, showing extremely fine Nupe embroidery. Beving collection 1934. British Museum, London





80 Chief James Madaki of Eyenu displays his obxanti apron of office with other Eloi traditional regalia. This particular apron is sewn with strips of saki cloth. Plateau State, see p. 79.

81 View of the port of Rabbah today. This old Nupe capital was an important textile entrepot on the Niger in the nineteenth century.



which they obtain from migrant Hausa weavers in the Abuja region. The Bunu and Aworo, who were long ago overrun by the Nupe from the north, are in fact distinct peoples who appear to have little in common with the eastern Yoruba, the Igbira or the Nupe. If with anyone, their relationship is probably with the Northern Edo. They make use of a most unusual kind of cloth for funeral and masquerade purposes, a cloth which does not fall into any of the main categories adopted in this book and which, if only for reasons of convenience, is included in this chapter.

Within the Nupe heartland the only place today to find Nupe weavers at work is in Bida and its environs. The older Nupe capital, Rabbah, is now but a pale shadow of its former glory; and Tabra and Kulfo have ceased to be textile towns.

Because of the loss of so many textile workers as a result of the Fulani wars, the founder of Bida, Etsu Massaba, in the 1860s brought into his new capital many craftsmen from Yorubaland; and he also encouraged the settlement there of prisoners of war.⁴ The result is a somewhat confused picture, a mixture of traditional Nupe with Yoruba influences which can still be seen in the use of loom equipment with distinct Yoruba features. During our fieldwork in 1978 and 1979 we endeavoured to work out some kind of classification of the fairly small numbers of weavers

now working in Bida. We detected two main groups, though there could well be others which we did not identify. First, there were pure Nupe weavers in the Bgongbara and Laruta quarters; and second, there were weavers in various degrees influenced by or descended from Yorubas, though in major cultural aspects now entirely Nupe, in the Mammusa Kadogi and Massaba quarters.



82 Street scene in Bida showing the house walls and katamba (entrance hut) in the Mammusa Kadogi quarter.

The Nupe and some of their neighbours

Original Nupe weavers

The first of our Bida groups comprises the descendants of old Nupe families who came, originally, from Rabbah, and who are the surviving representatives of the famous weavers of the old Nupe capital. Even in the 1930s, when Nadel was studying Nupe, this group was small, consisting, in fact, of a single compound. We found a few looms of this category, in the Bgongbara quarter near the Etsu Umoru Matige Palace; but we were informed that there were more in the Laruta quarter which we did not see for ourselves. The looms which we did locate were all the property of one family under the chief weaver Alhaji Suliman, who told us that he was an official Court weaver and who used to be directed by the present Emir's father to prepare gowns; but it looked as if the flow of Court orders had now dried up. In Alhaji Suliman's workshop there were five looms actually in operation. Hanging on the wall, however, were some two dozen sets of warps and loom equipment, some very old and dusty. The implication of an industry much shrunken today was clear enough.

The pure Nupe loom to be seen in Alhaji Suliman's workshop differs from the typical Yoruba loom in



84 Spare Nupe weaving sets with unfinished warps hanging on the wall. Note beater in right hand top corner. Alhaji Suliman's workshop, Bida

three main respects. The first is that in the Nupe loom the beater and heddles are attached not to a fixed frame but to a peg in the wall behind and above the loom, and that the weaving equipment is connected to the support by means of an iron hook. The second is the



the Nupe weaver does not sit upright on a ledge like the Yoruba but, rather, on the floor. Finally, the Nupe beater, while having some similarity to that of the Yoruba, has a characteristic bottom member, or bowl, made from a bundle of pieces of wood and palm fibre rather than from a single wooden element. Minor differences of possible significance are the use of calabash in place of a wooden sledge to support the drag weights and the decoration of the end of the breast beam tensioning rod (which the Yoruba call *iyinso*) with a paddle shaped handle, also of iron, and garnished with a set of rings around its edge after the manner of some northern heddle pulleys which will be described later, in Chapter 5. The basic form of loom supports, both front and rear, is very similar to that of the Yoruba.



85 Nupe calabash sledge used in Bida, called the *kunkuru*.

83 Inside a Nupe weaving shed of the chief weaver, Alhaji Suliman, in the Bgongbara quarter of Bida. Note skins used for floor seating, and position of looms.



86 Typical Nupe beater called the *masafi*. Bida. Size $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide \times $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches high. Note base made from a cluster of raffia palm strips and wood

The following are some Nupe names for loom parts

- egisankara*—heddle pulley
- bichipa*—pedals, of the short stick variety
- kunkuru* (Hausa for 'tortoise')—calabash support for drag weight
- bedah titti*—iron bar for tensioning breast beam
- nera*—heddle
- koshiya*—shuttle
- wofi*—bobbin
- kporofi*—warp beam
- takara*—breast beam
- masafi*—beater

Weavers under some degree of Yoruba influence

The weavers whom we saw in the Mammusa Kadogi and Massaba quarters of Bida appeared to be in varying degrees influenced by Yoruba ways in their craft practices, even though both in their own culture and in the cloth they produced they were undoubtedly Nupe

In the Mammusa Kadogi quarter, which is located in part outside the walls of Bida, it was estimated in 1979 that there were about a dozen or so weavers still at work. There had been, we were informed, as many as fifty only twenty years ago. The houses in this quarter were incorporated in large walled compounds within which the weavers worked concealed from the road. Weavers seemed to prefer to work in the entrance hut



87 Nupe weaver of Yoruba extraction working in the Mammusa Kadogi quarter of Bida. Upright seating position

to the compound (the *katamba*), and they were not difficult to find once the secret of their location had been solved. There were at least two distinct Yoruba features of looms in this quarter. The weaver did not sit on the ground but on a stone bench and in an upright posture. The bench was fairly low, extra room called for by his posture being provided by a shallow pit in which he placed his legs to work the heddle pedals. The pulley used here, of wood and vaguely anthropomorphic, was very close to the design favoured by the Yoruba. We also encountered another pulley type here, made from two fan-shaped segments of calabash, of a pattern which we have not seen elsewhere in West Africa.



88 An unusual Nupe heddle pulley made from calabash

As already noted, weaving in this quarter was definitely a craft on the wane. One weaver told us that there was not enough business to justify more than part time working; and the bulk of his output was a plain white strip, *edekun*, which was used for making burial shrouds, *fou*; yet another example of the role of funerary custom in preserving weaving traditions in Nigeria today

In the Massaba quarter, just north of the Bida central market, we encountered one old weaver, the last in the family to practise the craft, we were told, who was seated upright on a bench of full Yoruba height. His loom was situated in the inner women's courtyard of the house, an unusual location; and he was surrounded more or less by women's vertical looms, most of the women in the family being weavers. The beater on his loom was almost of the characteristic Yoruba type, and his heddles were worked by toe grips made from calabash discs. He, too, was concentrating on the manufacture of *edekun* white strip for use in shrouds which he sewed up himself and then took to market. His family had been in Bida for several generations. He had learnt his craft from someone outside his family



89 An old Nupe weaver in the Massaba quarter of Bida. Note the marked Yoruba loom characteristics such as the mud bench, incorporating short posts for the breast beam, and toe disc pedals

his father not having been a weaver. He told us that he thought that there were about ten weavers still working in the Massaba quarter.

Given the conservatism of Nigerian men weavers, especially in the pattern of their loom equipment, there could be no doubt that these Yoruba parallels which we noted in Bida were of some significance; but our enquiries failed to reveal the precise mechanism by which these Yoruba features made their way to Nupe. It is possible that contacts with Ilorin, not too far away, played their part.

Organization, warping, cloth types

All the Nupe weavers we encountered in Bida and its environs appeared to be working today as free craftsmen under the *buca* system rather than under the *efako* system which, in the past, bound weavers—particularly young men before marriage—to work for the joint family.⁵ Even in Nadel's day in the 1930s the guild system hardly applied to the weaving craft;⁶ and we could find no trace of guild structure today. Many weavers work on order for embroiderers and tailors of gowns and trousers. Other cloths are produced to private order. Apart from shrouds, very little narrow strip cloth woven in Bida finds its way to the Bida market.

Warping up in Nupe, at least in the Mammusa Kadogi section of Bida, demonstrated a method common in the north and alien to the Yoruba, namely the stringing along of the warp thread on the sides of houses and compound walls rather than on the ground. The method, of course, is very much the product of architecture which, in Nupe, is already acquiring many Sudanic features. Warp on the walls is safe from the risk of dirt and damage it would face if laid on the ground in narrow twisting streets. We will return to this practice again in the context of weaving in Zaria.

The Nupe call the unwoven warp *lulu wadere*, *lulu* meaning yarn as in *lulu mansari* (cotton yarn) and *lulu tsamiya* (silk yarn of *Anaphe* variety). The standard white woven strip resulting from the weaving of the warp, *edekun*, is measured in units known as *kpere*, taken from a full arm's length and corresponding closely to the English yard.

Apart from the plain *edekun*, the Bida weavers produce a version of the Yoruba *etu*, which in Nupe is *sabu*, a design used here as elsewhere for robes of importance. It was, indeed, this pattern of cloth from Nupe which Barth noted — 'the Tawarek esteem it more

than any kind' — and which reached these men of the Sahara from Nupe by way of Kano.⁷ In 1979 we saw a superb robe of the *riga* type (in Hausa, in Nupe *ewo* and in Yoruba *agbada*) in the possession of the Lamido of Adamawa at his Palace in Yola. He told us it had come from Bida; and it was a magnificent example of embroidery (of a particular kind called *shipka*) on a *sabu* cloth background. This was a good instance of the widespread distribution in Nigeria of quality Nupe gowns.

Nupe weavers do, of course, make use of patterns other than *edekun* and *sabu*. We noted, in particular, one design incorporating inlay, called *ndenah*, which differed from anything I saw in Yorubaland: indeed, its nearest parallels were in certain cloths made by the Ewe in the Volta Region of Ghana. Involved was the use of a supplementary weft woven right across the web on a count of three to give an over all surface float effect. Its use seemed to be reserved for women's wear. *Ikat* was also once common in Nupe. Known as *ekogi*



90 Nupe weaver warping up on house walls in the Mammusa Kadogi quarter of Bida. Note use of bobbins threaded lengthwise on the bobbins carrier.

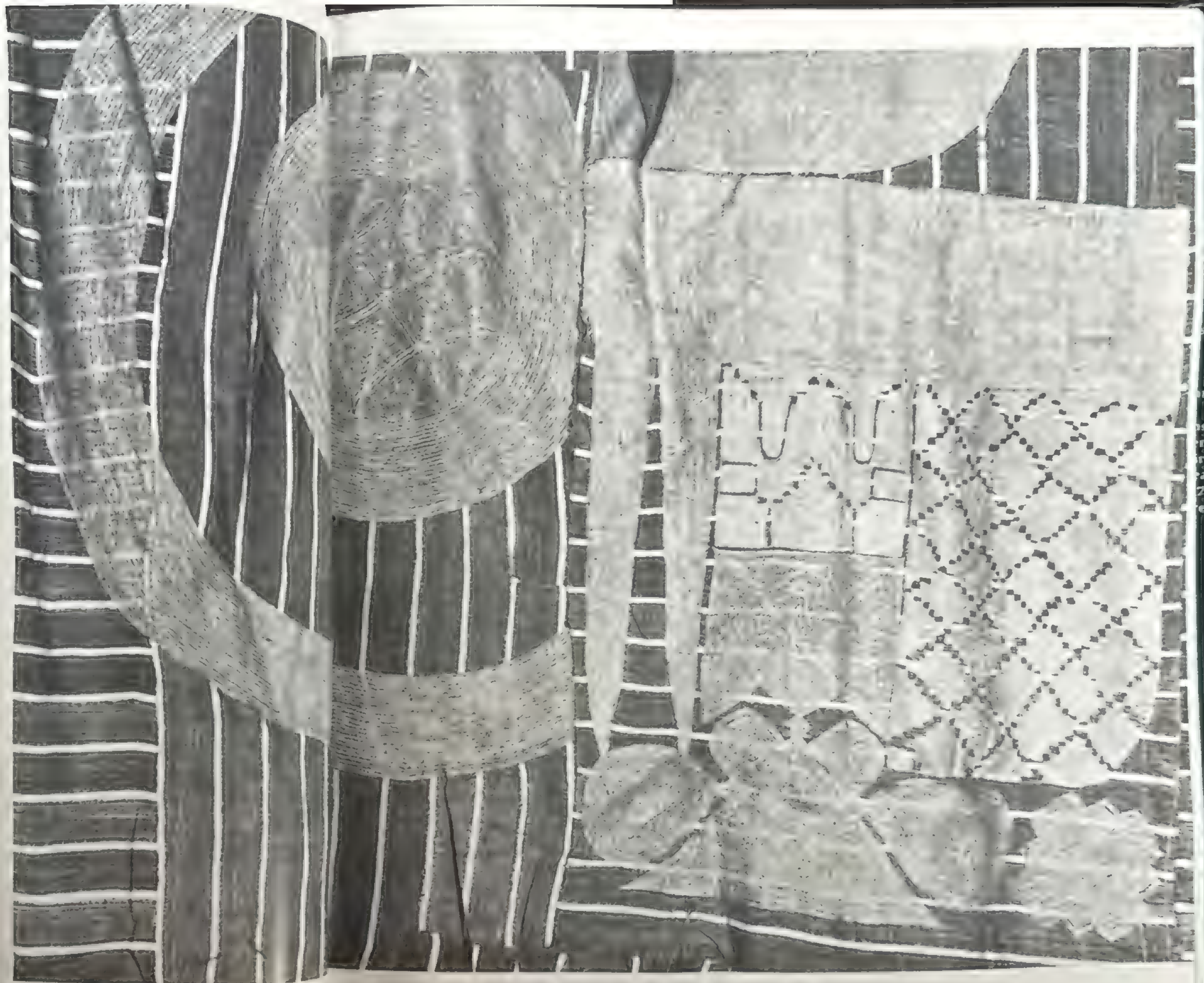
bishi, it too served the use of women: but it is rarely made today as it has had to compete both with Ilorin cloth of this general type as well as with the admirable woman's weave vertical loom cloths for which Bida is still famous and which will be discussed in Chapter 8.

The Nupe also make *egbah*, pink or magenta and based on either camwood-dyed *tsamiya* (in Yoruba *sanyan*) or *alharini*, though these are now both imitated in cotton. Barth encountered gowns (Hausa *riga*) of this fabric, which was highly prized in Kano where they were called *tob-harir*: he reported that they came from Nupe.⁸ Lander, at a slightly earlier date, saw the King of Kiama and his officials at the Begun Salleh festival splendidly arrayed, and 'of the tob'es [robes, or *riga*] worn by the men, none looked so well as those of a deep crimson colour on some of the horsemen', the reference evidently being to *tob-harir* of *egbah* cloth.⁹

Another Nupe speciality which we saw still being woven in Bida was a strip of a variety of red shades and known as *egbauo*. The main function of this material was for linings for the sleeves and hems of gowns of the *agbada*, *ewo* and *riga* varieties (as well as Yoruba *dandogo*). Traditionally this should be based on *alharini*; but, today, red cotton, usually of factory origin, tends to be used. This *egbauo* was also made into women's cloths, both wrappers and head ties. It seems most probable that some of the coloured silk cloths which Barth saw in Kano market and called *zenne* were, in fact, Nupe *egbauo*.¹⁰

Yet another important Bida cloth was of the *tsamiya* (or *sanyan*) pattern in the natural range of colours; but, while we saw some evidence of the use, if not today then in the fairly recent past, of real *Anaphe* silk, most of these cloths are now made from cotton imitation. At one time Bida *tsamiya* was famous all over northern Nigeria. Barth purchased in Kano a gown of the type he termed *riga tsamiya*, which he said was 'half of home made silk, obtained from a peculiar kind of silk worm which lives in the tamarind tree', and which was manufactured in Nupe.¹¹ In 1979 the Lamido of Adamawa most kindly showed us a magnificent example of this type (which he said was called *kwakwata*). He considered it to be one of his best robes and used it when riding round Yola on official business. The modern Bida varieties in cotton come in a number of patterns. *Edogi* has, for example, four pale

91 Natural brown silk Nupe robe from Bida known as *ewo tsamiya*. Typical Nupe embroidery worked with the white wild silk from the *moloneyi* moth



The Nupe and some of their neighbours

blue warp stripes in each strip; and *tsamiya aliga* has two blue warp stripes

Embroidery

It is probable that, at least in the field of narrow strip textiles and their fabrication into garments, the major claim of Bida to fame today lies in its production of gowns and, in particular, the skill of its embroiderers. Known as the *zanalo ghagigi*, embroiderers are to be found working in groups in various quarters of Bida town. Some concentrate on the embellishment of gowns made from broadcloth, a fabric which falls outside the scope of this book. Others specialize in the embroidering of narrow strip gowns.

The narrow strip gowns made in Bida are usually decorated with variations of the design known as *aska*

askwas ('eight knives' in Hausa). In essence this consists of a very large pocket on the left side of the front of the gown, covered with embroidery which may well extend down beyond the pocket to the hem. The largest of the knives or swords (*aska*), usually two, lie like very long fangs on the right hand side of the pocket with others of smaller size distributed elsewhere on or off the pocket on the left side of the gown. On both the right side of the front of the gown and the centre of the back are large circles which can have rays spiralling out from them. The neck of the gown is vee shaped as opposed to the circular neck of the Yoruba *dandogo*. While the whole question of embroidery lies somewhat outside the scope of this book, the following pattern names in Bida are perhaps worth recording:



92

92 An old white silk robe from Bida, sewn from $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch strips of pale brown wild silk and handspun white cotton. The curious barbed (*gabiya*) pattern in the embroidery is typical of Bida.

93 An old Nupe pure silk robe from Bida. This particular pattern is known as *ewo tsamiya aliga*. The sleeves are missing from this specimen.



The Nupe and some of their neighbours

- egba jufon — a long and short sword motif
- gabiya — a curious triple leaf or barb pattern
- shaski — squares
- gbanko tsufon — embroidered strip above the pocket
- gidan nazuman — large circles

The variety of embroidered pattern is considerable, and its application to any one gown depends largely on price. There is some evidence to suggest that in recent times the repertoire of these patterns has increased; and that such gowns are designed rather less according to a strict canon than was the case over a century ago when Barth saw Nupe gowns in Kano market.¹² The patterns, or at least the ones of the older tradition, are derived from designs with parallels throughout the Saharan region and have their roots in both talismanic concepts and Islamic views on decoration.¹³ Certain designs, or their variants, are associated in tradition with specific embroidery centres like Ilorin, Dikwa, Kano, Katsina, Daura and so on. It seemed to us that the Bida embroiderers were rather more conventional and traditionalist in their selection of embroidery patterns



94 Nupe robe in sabu pattern ground cloth woven in the first half of the nineteenth century. Note restricted embroidery layout and early use of gabiya pattern. Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.



95 A typical Nupe blue sabu robe with extremely fine characteristic Bida embroidery showing clearly the egba jufon (short sword), the gabiya (triple leaf or barb pattern), the shaski (squares), the gbanko tsufon (strip above pocket) and the gidan nazuman (circle on the left). Bida



The Nupe and some of their neighbours. *tsaka tun ene*. The *sabu* ground is decorated with small squares of coloured woollen yarns. Bida

than were their colleagues in Zaria and Kano. The practice is general of embroidering the pocket section on its own and sewing it on to the gown after its decoration has been completed. Perhaps the oldest surviving Nupe gown of the *riga* type is one in the 1841 Egga collection in the British Museum. Of mixed cotton and *tsamiya* in very light natural shades. It displays the absolute minimum of embroidery, but including two *aska* motifs (see: J. Picton & J. Mack, *African Textiles*, London 1979, p. 194 for an illustration of this garment).

Bida gowns made from narrow strip cloth tend to follow the practice so common in the case of other narrow strip cloths in their naming: they take as their base the background strip. Hence, for example in Nupe, a *sabu* based robe will be called *ewo sabu*, and one based on *Anaphe* silk (or its imitation) could be *tsamiya aliga*.

The main concentration of embroiderers in Bida appears to be in the Efumayaki quarter. The organization of the craft is on a family basis with a recognized chief embroiderer, the *Etsu Delali*, who has some control over standards and who handles orders for

gowns from the Emir. There is an apprenticeship system; but adult embroiderers may operate the *buca* system in which they act on their own in the execution of orders. The family as a whole, however, may help out in the financing of the purchase of cloth and yarns.

One Bida embroiderer in this quarter with whom I talked, Alhaji Sado, worked on his own on the verandah in front of his house, taking one order at a time and using the proceeds from it to finance his next order. A good gown could well take him six months or more to complete. Lacking an order, he was prepared, he said, to embroider a gown as a speculation. Alhaji Sado denied having recourse to any pattern book as a source for designs: he said that Bida embroiderers were born with the patterns already in their heads, in other words that the patterns were transmitted by example over the generations. When embroidering broadloom cloth, the embroiderer may ink in the design outline before setting to with needle and thread; and he may also make faint indicator marks on narrow strip cloth. Alhaji Sado, however, seemed to work entirely from memory without any prior drawing of the pattern, even in the roughest outline, on the cloth. We were enormously impressed by both

the skill and patience of embroiderers like Alhaji Sado; and we were very pleased to find that his craft was one which was still flourishing.

Alhaji Sado, and his colleagues in the Efumayaki quarter, seemed to specialize in the embroidering of gowns of *sabu* cloth. Other workers on *sabu* were to be found in the Kabaligulu quarter.

In the Mannati quarter we found embroiderers working on *tsamiya* cloth. For thread they used the silk from *Anaphe moloneyei*, of whitish shade, much of which was purchased in Kano market where, while not hard to find, it was in 1979 becoming rather expensive. It was usually most easily obtained, however, during the dry season, so it was necessary to lay in a fair stock to last through the wet months from June to September. The Mannati embroiderers whom we saw usually worked in the gate houses, *katamba*, of their compounds; and there did seem to be some correlation between their craft and the running of Koranic schools. In a number of *katamba* we saw, along with embroiderers seated at work, rows of paddle-shaped boards with Koranic inscriptions, the text books of such places of learning. The head of one such embroidery family told us that he did not have any



97 Alhaji Sado working on his verandah in the Efumayaki quarter of Bida. Here they specialize in the embroidery of blue *sabu* cloth.



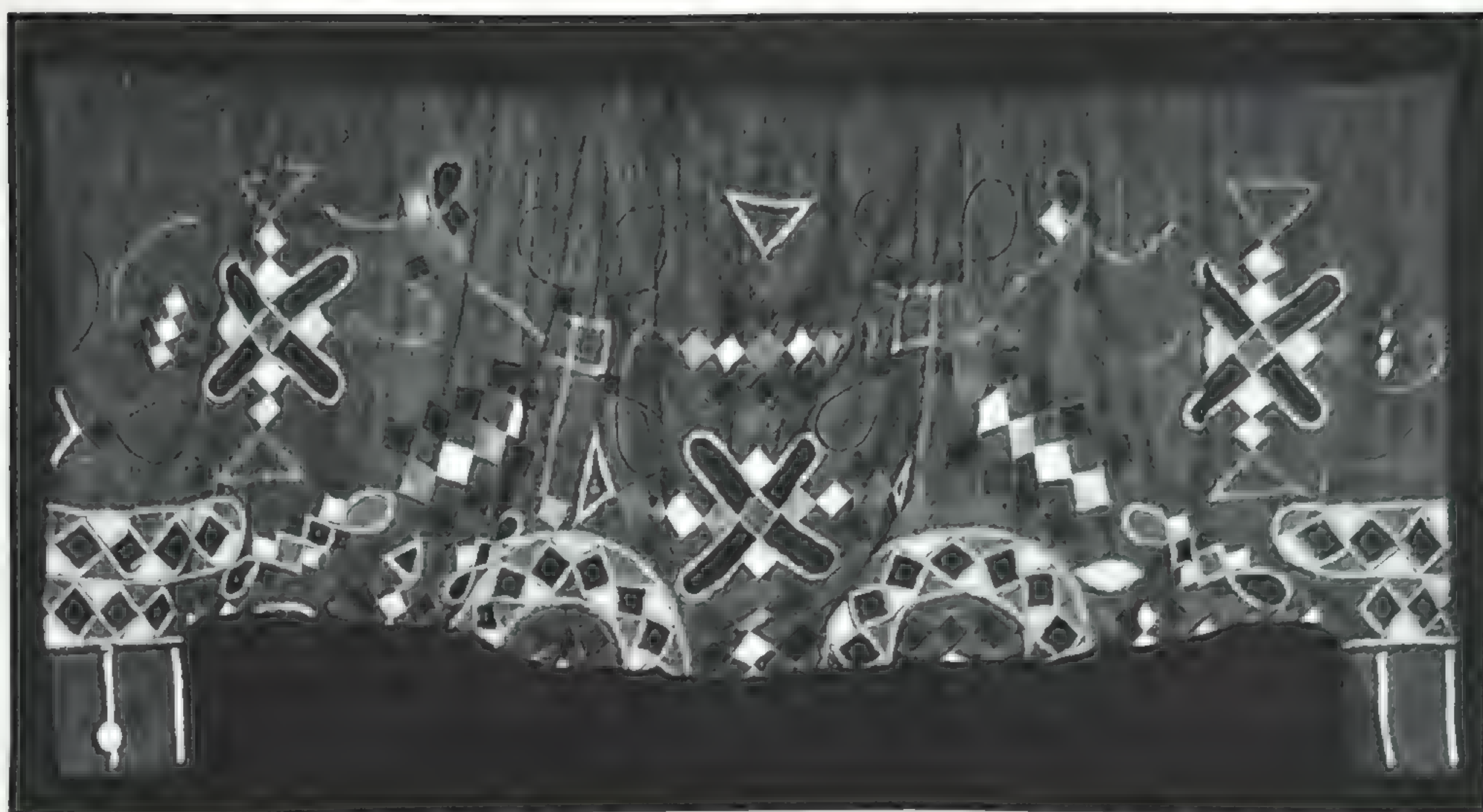
Fig. 1. A large, wide, circular garment, likely a traditional Nigerian gown, laid flat. The garment features a dark, possibly black, outer border and a lighter, textured inner section. The inner section is decorated with a large, intricate, circular pattern that resembles a stylized face or a complex geometric design. The garment is shown against a dark background.

specimens at that time but was working on gowns which he would dispose of to dealers who would then carry them all over Nigeria; and, indeed, we encountered just such a dealer in Zaria with a stock of very high-priced garments from Bida.

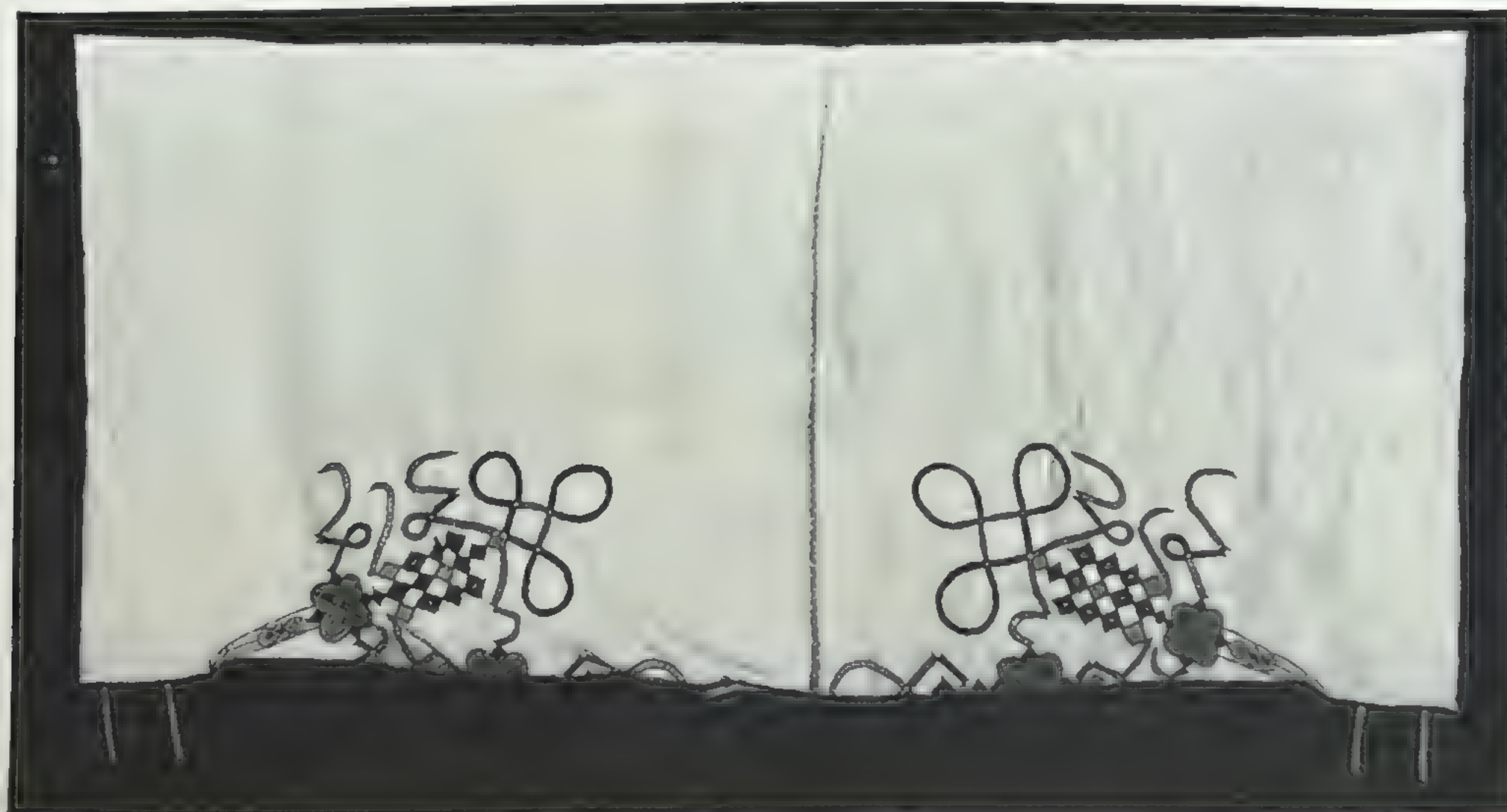
Apart from gowns, there exists another category of embroidered garment, the enormously wide trousers known as *tsaka tun ene*. Some of these may run to 200 cm. in circumference around the waist; and they are usually covered with elaborate embroidery including a very large central pattern. Unlike the gowns, the trousers are decorated with many colours, blues, yellows, oranges, greens, reds, pinks and so on, and the two small tubular foot openings (*kamu*) are also

elaborately decorated. The yarn is often imported tapestry wool of indifferent quality. As early as 1908 Constance Larymore wondered why such inferior materials should be used in work of such complexity;¹⁴ and the question remains unanswered today. We experienced some difficulty in finding anyone who worked on the embroidery of these trousers. Eventually, however, we found such a person in a stall in the centre of Bida market from whom we obtained a pair of trousers of his own manufacture. He was not only embroiderer but also tailor and cloth dealer. There do seem to be some parallels between the designs on these trousers and those executed on broadcloth smocks by the Shewo

99 Wide-waisted trousers known as *tsaka tun ene*. This pair is exceptionally large. Probably from Bida. Blue *sabu* cloth. Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool.



100 Wide white trousers from Kano, with green embroidery possibly worked by Nupe embroiderers. Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool. 1906.



Arabs of Borno, of which there are some superb examples collected by Nachtigal in 1876 and now in Berlin.

Trousers of the *tsaka tun ene* type are well represented in European museum collections.¹⁵ Modern examples are vast; but they may have been even larger in the past, following the Islamic tradition of fantastic trousers, which extends right across the Islamic world to Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. In the early 1830s Oldfield encountered the King of Obofoh on the Benue (Tchadda) wearing no less than three gowns one over the other, beneath which were 'a pair of Haussa trousers, the seat of which reached to the ground'.¹⁶ A few years later Barth found

trousers of this type eagerly sought after by the Tuareg, so much so that their sale was a distinctive feature of the market in Agadès.¹⁷ It is possible, of course, that the Tuareg demand may have played its part in establishing the embroidery style of these garments, so different from that of the robes of the *riga* type (which many nineteenth century travellers called *tobes*, a term apparently derived from Egyptian Arabic usage for a flowing garment worn by both men and women, *tawb*, or in standard Arabic *thawb*; but south of the Sahara a *tobe* is nearly always a male garment).

We endeavoured in 1978 and 1979 to establish the number of embroiderers working in Bida. Our best information was that there were now about two



101 A Nupe weaver in Kutigi, with loom displaying marked Yoruba pattern. Sheep scapula bone acts as a fulcrum for pedals.



102 Use of *bedah titi* in breast beam iron tension rod on Kutigi loom.

hundred such craftsmen and that, in all probability, embroiderers outnumber male weavers. Both, of course, are no match in numbers for the women weavers of Bida. The use of the woman's upright loom in Bida is of great importance to that part of the

Nigerian weaving industry discussed elsewhere in this book. It may be, indeed, that the expansion of women's weaving in Bida has been a contributory factor in the decline of male weaving in Nupe.

Kutigi

Nadel reported in 1934 on four Nupe villages with weavers, namely Kutigi, Sakpe, Enagi and Dabba. In 1978 and 1979 we only found weavers in the first two, Kutigi and Sakpe; and we were told that in the other two weaving had ceased some years ago. For our research we concentrated on Kutigi.

In Kutigi we were told that there were only one weavers, all of the same family and, indeed, related to the ten weavers reported to be in Sakpe. The Kutigi weaving family operated a quite impressive business, both in weaving and in dyeing, the latter the work of the women, all carried out in a spacious compound. The looms in this compound were all of that variety of Nupe loom for which some Yoruba affinities have been suggested. Notable were, also, the use of the iron winding rod for the breast beam, *bedah titi*, with a flat, paddle-shaped end with rings inset, and the employment of animal bones set in the ground to provide a fulcrum for the heddle pedals. This last was a feature we found particularly common in Zaria looms. Production, here, appeared to be confined to three main categories of cloth, plain white strip for shrouds, *sabu* and an imitation *tsamiya* in cotton.

In the Kutigi compound it was dyeing rather than weaving that seemed to predominate.¹⁹ The yarns dyed here came from outside as well as from within the family; and much of the yarn so dyed ended up on women's upright looms. The main dye used was indigo, *eshin*, the process of dyeing being *eshin danshin*. Large quantities of alkali (*suaka*) were being prepared in the compound by the leaching of ash. The pots used in this process included some of the most magnificently decorated which it has been our pleasure to see in West Africa. Apart from dyeing, there was apparatus in this compound—a log and a pair of heavy mallets—for the beating of dyed cloth to give it gloss and texture.

The Kutigi weavers complained of the present difficulty in obtaining yarns of suitable quality. Hand spinning locally had virtually ceased. Factory yarn they found too thin; it required to be thickened by twisting into six-ply and stiffening by a starching process.

been many more. The Nupe weavers seemed to prefer to work in the gate houses, *katamba*, of their compounds with their warps stretching out into the street. Others, particularly those of Kanuri origin from Borno, used an open shed. Whatever the original background, all the Keffi weavers whom we saw used looms of the kind we had seen in Bida, with the weaver seated on the ground. The beater and heddles were attached to house or shed wall. Animal bones, as in Kutigi, were used as fulcrums for pedals. The beater here was not of the characteristic Nupe type but, with a leather-covered bowl, of a pattern very common in Zaria. It was hard to escape the conclusion that, at Keffi, Hausa influence was strong, mixed as it was with that of Nupe, and of other regions as well, no doubt. The mixture had produced what could only be described as a distinctive Keffi blend. One Kanuri weaver from Borno told me that he had learned to weave after he arrived in Keffi, which was why he showed no technical trace of his place of origin.

Cloth from Keffi was of particular interest as it appeared that it preserved a number of old Nupe features which were no longer to be found in Bida. There were several echoes of designs in the British Museum Egga collection made in 1841. Two patterns, *bade bade* and *anashe*, for example, though made basically of cotton, are often interwoven with red-dyed *tsamiya* and *alharini*. Neither of these old Nupe designs were we able to see in Bida.



104 Working position of Nupe loom in use in Keffi.



103 The *Landan seriki nufaina*, chief weaver of the Nupe in Keffi

The Nupe in Keffi

Keffi, today a fairly large town situated in the western part of Plateau State, was once the capital of the old Emirate of Keffi, founded in 1802 by the ruling Fulani house of Katsina.²⁰ The establishment of the Emirate, with its attendant Court ceremonial, created a demand for a variety of crafts including weaving; and this fact probably explains how Nupe weavers came to settle there. Many groups moved into this region, Koro, Jaba, Yeskwa, Gbari and Gwandara,²¹ all of whom needed cloth and created the basis for a good textile market for the immigrant weavers, who included not only Nupe but also Hausa, Yoruba and, even, weavers from as far away as Borno, all today using the Hausa language but weaving very much in the Nupe manner.

In 1979 we met the chief weaver of Keffi, whose title was *Landan seriki nufaina*. He told us that his own grandfather had come from Bida, but that other Nupe weavers had origins in Badeggi, Agaie and Lapai. His estimate was that there remained still about fifty weavers in Keffi of Nupe descent. There had formerly

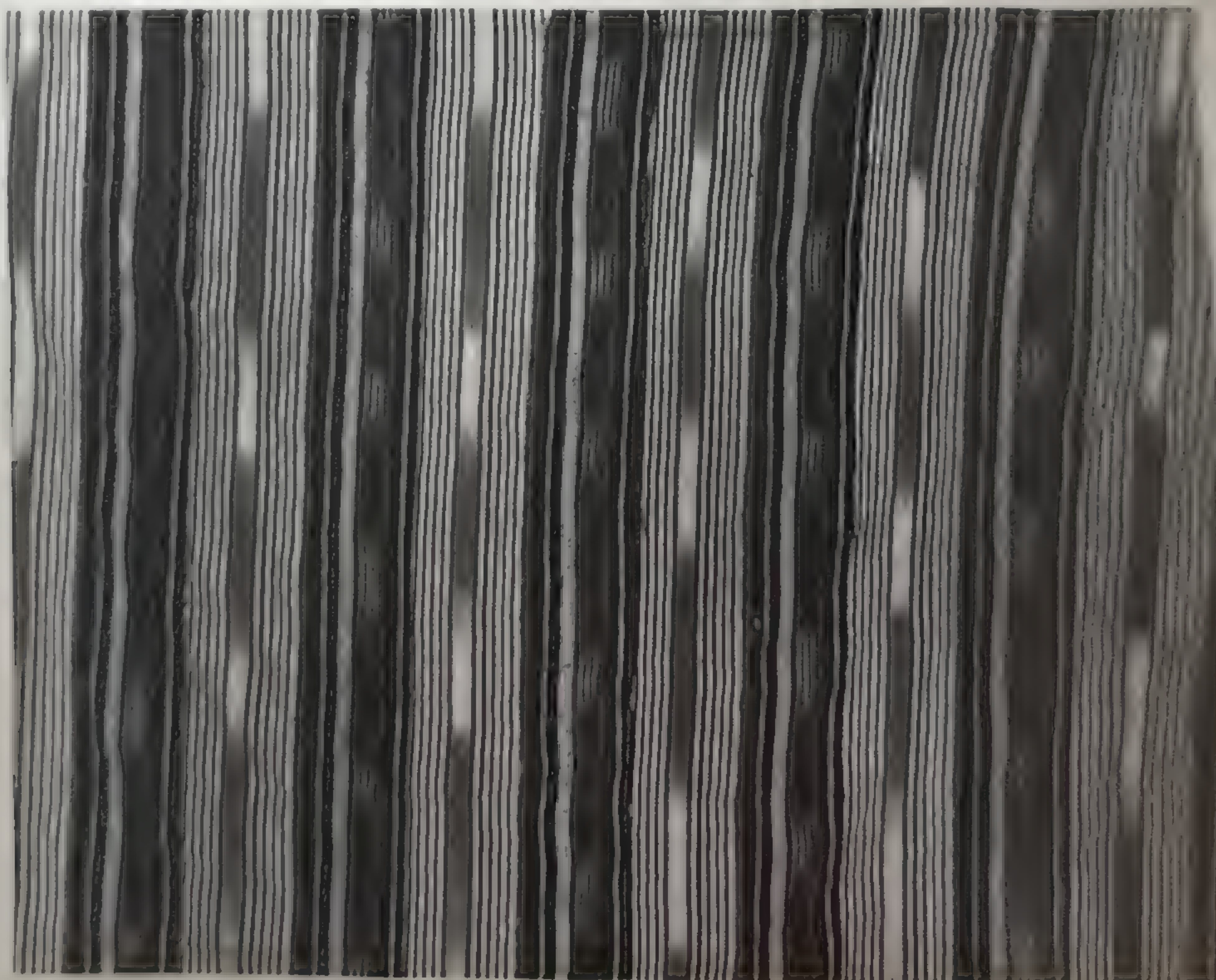


105 A large Keffi cloth in Keffi.

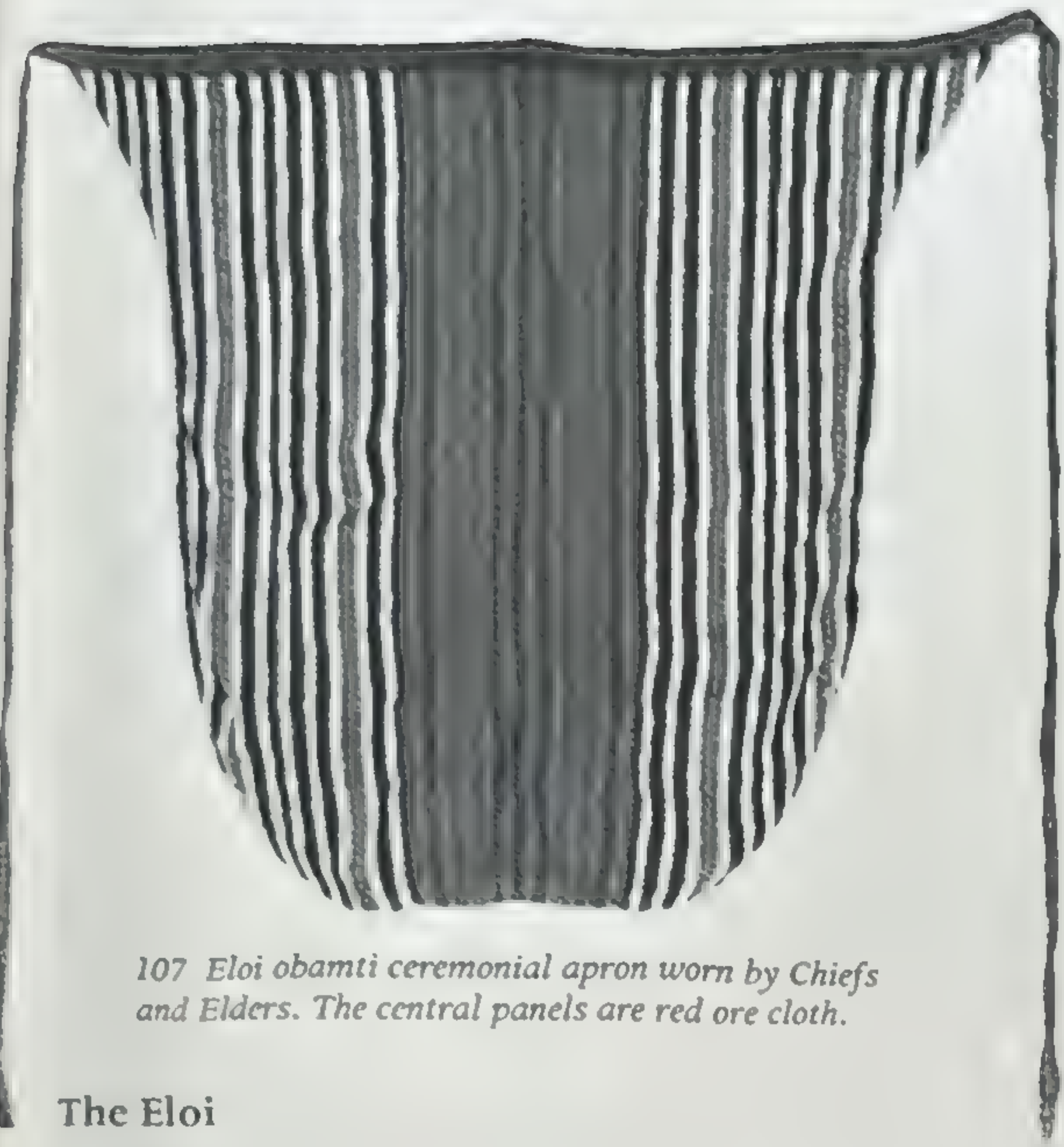
Ikat, not present in the 1841 Egga cloths, is very much a feature of Keffi today. It is called *kafi yan gada*, in fact a Hausa word for a type of striped cloth (the Hausa do not appear to use the *ikat* technique); and only the oldest of the weavers at Keffi knew the

Nupe term *ekogi bishi*. Our impression was that some kind of relationship existed between Keffi *ikat* and the *ikat* decorated *oparo* cloths of Ilorin.

Keffi cloths are used as men's cloths, worn *toga* fashion like the Yoruba *aso ibora*, and as women's wrappers. The normal strip is usually about 10 inches wide, sixteen going to a man's cloth of 3 yard length and ten to twelve for a woman's cloth of rather shorter length. The bulk of the cloth production of Keffi is now being exported to markets south of the Benue like Makurdi and Gboko for the use of the Arago, Agata, Idoma, Tiv and Jukun, much of it distributed by women traders. Very little Keffi cloth was to be found in Keffi or Nasarawa markets. Away from Keffi, the Keffi cloths are often known by the Jukun name *tsukudu*.²² Apart from garments, they have a wide use as burial shrouds. The pattern of marketing of Keffi cloths provides a good example of a phenomenon to be encountered elsewhere in Nigeria of cloth woven by one group for the use of quite different people in regions quite remote from the original place of manufacture. Many smaller weaving groups, and the old traditional patterns they make survive in Nigeria today only because of this kind of mechanism.



106 Large Keffi man's cloth known by the Jukun name of *tsukudu*. These cloths are exported to Jukun and Tiv markets south of the Benue, and represent the main output of the Keffi weavers today.



107 Eloi obamti ceremonial apron worn by Chiefs and Elders. The central panels are red ore cloth.

The Eloi

The Eloi live in scattered villages in the land south of Nasarawa between Onda Udeni and Doma.²³ While they, themselves, are attached to the name Eloi, they have sometimes been called Afu or Afao. Armstrong includes them within the Idoma-speaking peoples of the Niger-Benue confluence. The Eloi have a certain reputation as weavers and dyers, and, as such, they have moved as far afield as Makurdi and the Mada country to dispose of their wares. Today the Eloi weaving industry has much shrunk. We found about twenty weavers in Onda and perhaps ten more in Eyenu. The Chief of Indo, himself a weaver, regretted that in his village weaving had now died out. All the Eloi Chiefs to whom we talked agreed about the state of decline of the craft among their people.

The Eloi loom has many Hausa features. Two stout forked uprights stuck in the ground support the warp beam. The heddles, *asha*, and the beater, *egba*, hang from a tree in front of which the weaver sets up his loom. The weaver's posture is more or less seated upright – more in the Yoruba than in the Hausa manner. The breast beam, *opi oru*, is right in the weaver's lap. The upright posture allows for good movement of the short sideways located pedals, *aliasha*.

The cloth produced on this loom, however, suggests much Nupe influence, probably by way of Keffi. The main Eloi cloths have various combinations of blue and white warp stripes, some of which, *okposi*, *utumusu* and *kwongi*, are much worn by women. There is also a

local version of the guineafowl pattern family, Yoruba *etu* and Nupe *sabu*, to which the Eloi give the Hausa name *saki*. An important design is *ore*, red with white warp stripes and a few hidden wefts in black; and another is *kumu*, always of hand spun yarn, which is used mainly for shrouds and the linings of aprons. Originally, only hand spun yarn was used, produced locally by Eloi women, who also did the indigo dyeing. Of late, however, the use of factory yarn has been increasing. Red yarn, to which particular value is attached, may always have had to be brought in from outside by the Eloi. Another innovation has been a cobalt blue colour in contrast to the traditional indigo.

The Eloi women use three traditional cloths to make up their set of clothing, for which they depend on the local weaving industry. First, there is the basic wrapper, *patari*, consisting of five strips of basic blue and white patterns, *okposi*, *utumusu* or *kwongi*, and with one *saki* strip, sewn up to make a short waist tie measuring 23 × 53 inches. The possession of at least one *patari* cloth is considered to be essential. Some of the older specimens are magnificent examples of hand spun cotton cloth.

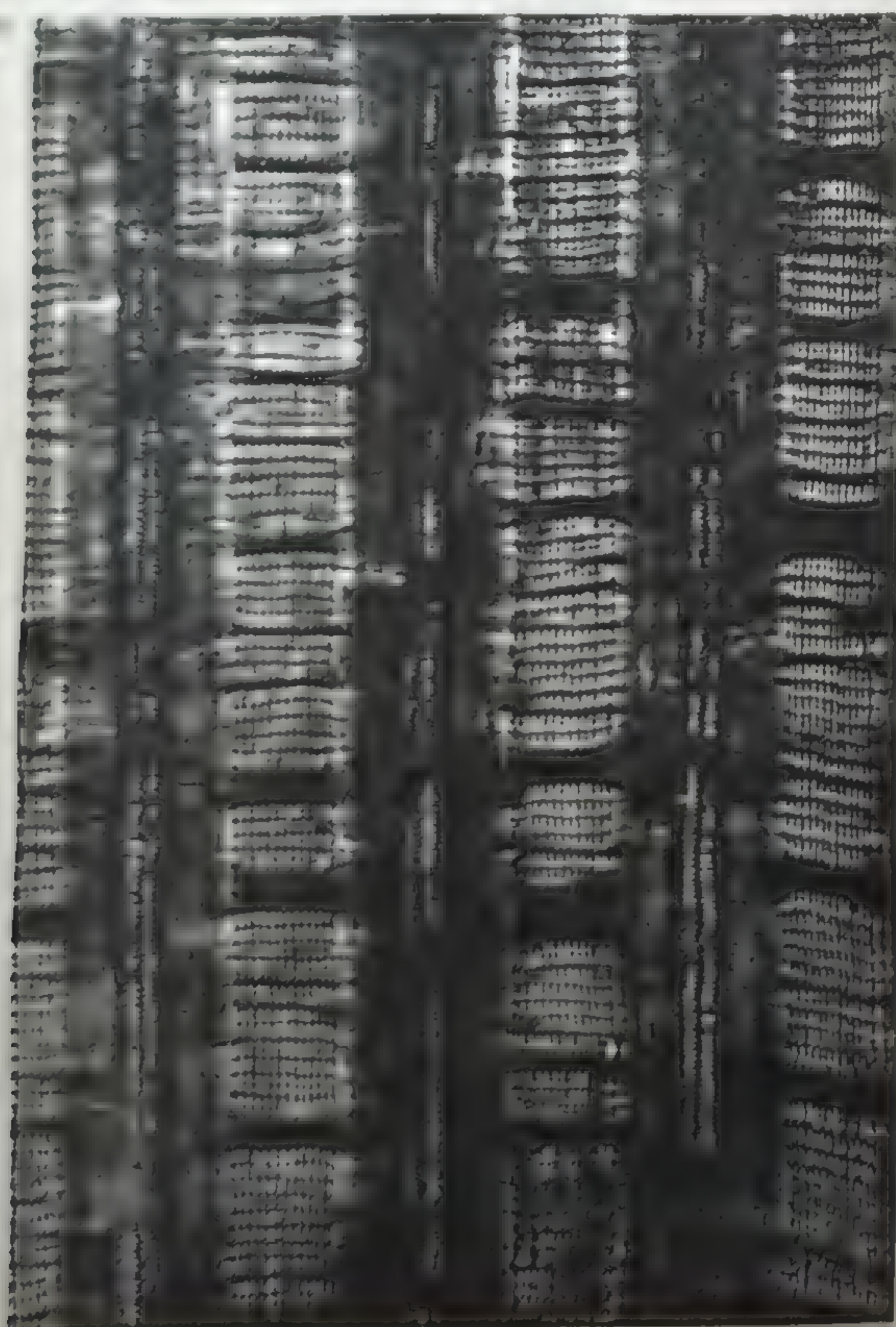
The second cloth is the *asuala*, a large wrapper worn around the body under the arms and used for marriages and funerals. It consists of nine strips of the same range of patterns as the *patari*, but is much longer, measuring about two yards.

The third cloth is the head tie, *okpa ugi*, sewn from plain strips of *kumu* dyed a deep indigo blue. Each woman dyes her own *okpa ugi* by a process known as *egedi*; and the cloth in question will eventually form part of its owner's burial attire, which, of course, gives it a special importance. The Gbari women living near the Eloi have a similar head tie of blue which they use in the same way. Eloi men also have a cloth of this type which, likewise, will do service at their funerals.

Apart from the cloths listed above, the Eloi weavers also attach great importance to the making of special aprons to be worn by Chiefs, garments called *obamti* (perhaps a term derived from the Hausa *bante* meaning loincloth) which are attached to the waist by ties made from *saki* strip. These garments are shaped more or less in the form of a heraldic shield, of varying width and length though a width of about 30 inches would seem the norm. They are made from six strips, worn vertically, and the strips may be of *okposi*, *utumusu*, *kwongi* or even *saki* design, often including a pair of red *ore* strips down the centre. *Obamti* are usually lined in part or in whole with strips of plain white



108. Upper part of the *Obamti* strips together with a braided border. *Obamti* from Abuja 109. Detail of narrow strip *bubu*je and *obamti* strips and *obamti* with indigo. *Bicari*



kumu or white with very simple warp stripes. In *Obamti* are worn by Chiefs, Elders and men who have proved themselves worthy of this dress by feats of strength and endurance. It is interesting that apron-like garments of this general form are found elsewhere in Nigeria, among the Angas for example (see Chapter 11). In 1979 we were given a demonstration of the wearing of the *obamti* by James Madaki, Chief of Eyenu, who tied it on over a robe of broadcloth; but it seems probable that there was a time when it would have been worn on its own.

Eloi cloths are to be found on sale in Nasarawa market today. At one time they reached markets as far to the south as Makurdi and were much sought after by the Mada and Arago. Eloi weaving, however, is very much in decline; and it seems as if the Keffi weavers have captured many traditional Eloi markets. Indeed, we found Keffi weavers were actually making Eloi-type cloths; and the Eloi were buying Keffi-woven *patari* cloths in Keffi market.

Gbari cloth

In Abuja and its surrounding villages we can see a phenomenon similar to that noted in connection with Keffi, where migrant weavers serve a wide variety of peoples. In Abuja the weavers in question are descendants of Zazzau Hausa who settled in and around Abuja in the 1850s. They work in scattered villages in small family compounds among local Gbari, Gwandara and Koro. Here the Gbari, the largest group, are thought to have migrated from the east, while the Gwandara may have come from the north. The Koro could well be the original inhabitants of the region. Also in this district there are Bassa, Eloi and Mada.

To all these peoples the migrant Hausa were able to supply a basic white cloth which, dyed dark blue, became the habitual wrapper or toga for women and men. The Gbari, however, are of particular interest because they have required of the Hausa weavers a special type of cloth which they have then further processed for their own particular purposes. This special Gbari cloth makes a fascinating study for it provides yet another example of the old Nigeria which is fast disappearing. We counted ourselves fortunate to have been able to find a Hausa compound in Abuja where we could see all the equipment involved in its manufacture, along with samples, even though the family in question had in fact given up its manufacture.



110 Red Bunu abata cloth with less complex woollen inlay designs. Wear and tear indicate frequent use of these rarer cloths today.

111 Detail of a single strip of Bunu abata cloth, showing complex inlay technique using red woollen yarns. Olle.

This Gbari cloth is known as *sakasakwoi*. It is a white strip, about three inches wide, so woven as to have rows of weft holes made by passing the weft through a series of twisted warps. Some of these arrangements are so elaborate as to make the cloth look something like a coarse mesh gauze net. The Gbari buy these strips from the Hausa weavers and then proceed to treat them in a manner which may well be unique.

The sewer, usually a man, will grip one end of a strip with his toes while joining it to another strip, a practice usual enough in West Africa. What is not usual is his technique of turning the joint between the two selvages into what amounts to a braiding of one strip to another, using the same hand spun yarn as that in the strips, and in the process adding a certain amount of extra width to the resultant cloth. There are a number of variations possible in the method of braiding, to which may be added a further elaboration of fringes. The end result is a cloth the narrow strip nature of which may well be so concealed as to escape the notice of the uninitiated. Sometimes, instead of the three inch strip, a rather wider strip of over twenty





112 Bunu abata cloth of the ifala group of patterns. Abata cloths are used in funeral ritual, often at the second memorial ceremonies. They are not actual shrouds, nor are they buried with the dead. Olle.

inches is used to make what is essentially a two panel cloth. There are parallels to this wider strip elsewhere in Nigeria, among the Tiv for example. Once braided together, the cloth is dyed in a mixture of wood ash and wild indigo to produce a blue so deep as almost to be black. The cellular effect is quite remarkable.

The completed woman's Gbari cloth is known as *bubu**je*. Every Gbari woman has at least two, one worn as a wrapper coming right up to the armpit, and the second as a head tie worn as a kind of turban with a tail hanging down the neck.

The origin of this craft is both fascinating and rather mysterious. We were told that at one time not only Hausa weavers but also Eloi made this cloth in its white form; and there may still be a few Eloi weavers so employed. Also, it is said that at one time the Bassa and the Gwandara also supplied the Gbari with the basic material for this cloth; but on the basis of our fieldwork it seems to us unlikely that they still do so. According to Temple the Bassa weavers must have belonged to a group who came originally from south of Zaria to settle in a large arc around Koton Karifi, Koton Koro and Nasarawa;²⁵ but our information would indicate that these Bassa have ceased to weave. The Gbari now rely for their basic material on Hausa production sold at rural markets such as Izom and Diko north of Abuja. It seems that there are Hausa weavers scattered about between Abuja and Kaduna who meet this demand.

*Bubu**je* cloths play a part in marriage ceremonies both as gifts and apparel. They are also used as baby ties. Finally, like the Eloi, the Gbari women are buried with their head ties as a significant part of their funeral dress. Gbari men, too, make a similar use of this kind of cloth, in combination with robes of the Hausa *riga* variety dyed a deep indigo blue. Temple has some interesting observations on the role of cloth in Gbari funerals.²⁶ Our visit to the Gbari country suggested that there was no shortage of *bubu**je* cloth around; so somewhere there must be weavers, presumably Hausa, kept busy in the production of the basic white strips for it. *Bubu**je* cloth is not represented in any European museum collection which we have seen. Indeed, our first introduction to this intriguing textile was in the private collection of Bernard Fagg, who most kindly let us examine and photograph it. The interrelationship between Hausa and other weavers on the one hand and Gbari users on the other is clearly of some antiquity, a facet of the complexity of Nigerian tradition which one hopes will long continue to flourish.

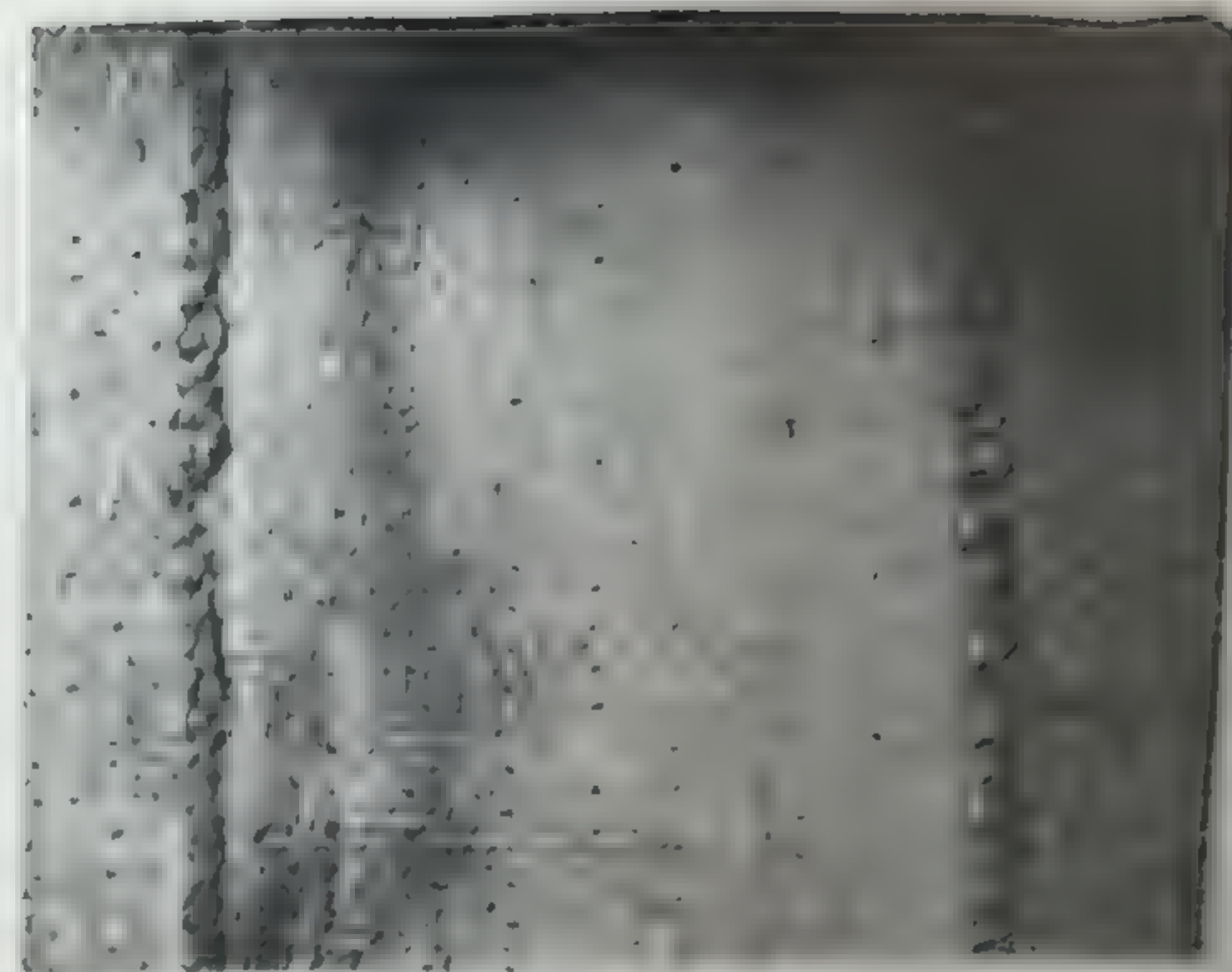


113 Gbari women wearing the *bubu**je* wrapper and head tie and baby cloth. Bwari.

The Bunu and Aworo

The Bunu and the Aworo live in the extreme northeastern corner of Kwara State, between Lokoja and Eggan and as far east as Insanlu: their southern boundary is in the region of Kabba. Forde has drawn a relationship between them and the Owe of Kabba and the Ijumu, all of whom he declared spoke a Yoruba dialect.²⁷ Other students have concluded that the Bunu and the Aworo are autochthonous to the region they now occupy as well as to Koton Karifi; and, moreover, that many members of these two groups were pushed westwards in the late eighteenth century under Fulbe pressure.²⁸ There is some evidence for nineteenth century invasion by Nupe and the existence of some intermingling of cultures. As far as cloth is concerned, today it would be hard indeed to detect Nupe influence in the cloths of the Bunu and Aworo.

Temple reported that the Bunu were famous for their weaving; and that special renown was attached to their burial cloths. As so often has been the case with literary accounts of weaving and textiles in West Africa, it was not so easy to establish what Bunu cloth actually looked like. John Picton, then of the Museum of Mankind (British Museum), showed us in 1978 a cloth which he had collected for the Museum in 1972 from a village called Koroko near Okene.²⁹ This, he



114 and 115 Bunu abata cloth and detail of reverse side showing extremely thick twelve ply wefts. Red inlay appears on one side only. British Museum, London.

said, was a Bunu cloth. It was, in truth, a very odd cloth, so thick and heavy in feel, more like an oriental carpet than a West African cotton fabric. In size about that of a normal man's cloth, it was made from eight-inch strips with a weft of extraordinary thickness, twelve ply at least, and a warp, while thinner than the weft, still thick by standards of other Nigerian cloths. The background, warp and weft, is white hand spun cotton; but it is decorated by means of a technique which we have not found elsewhere in the West African narrow strip weaving complex, a technique that can best be described as surface tapestry. Using yarn of wool or wool and cotton mixed, of various hues—blue, green, beige, yellow, white, but predominantly red—a complicated system of pattern is established right along the strip by inlaying yarn at considerable intervals between the top side warp threads and the weft. This is only possible because the thick weft gives the background of the cloth the appearance almost of some kind of basket. The bright decoration, by this technique, should only appear at all on one side, though, in practice, the occasional thread of surface decoration shows through, albeit in a random manner, on the back. The red yarns which make up the bulk of the surface design look very much as if they have been derived from the unravelling of the old traditional British Army scarlet hospital blanket; and our enquiries led us to believe that in fact in many cases this is just where these yarns came from. One should not be surprised. After all, West Africans have been using yarns from unravelled imported cloth since long before the first Portuguese set foot on the coast of Guinea.

We showed a photograph of the Museum of Mankind Bunu cloth to the wife of the Chief of the

Bunu, Oba Ikusemore, in Olle, who confirmed that it was indeed a cloth belonging to her people. We then pursued this question in other Bunu towns, Luke and Kirri. It then became clear that these cloths play an important part in Bunu funerary rituals. Known as *abata*, they are preserved by certain families in Bunu towns and villages who let them out on hire to those who may have need of them for particular events. In Olle we were able to find, in fact, but three of these *abata* cloths, two being of seven strips apiece and the third consisting of but one strip. All three were clearly of some antiquity; and we gathered that no *abata* cloth had been woven in Olle, Luke and Kirri for some years.

We were told that there were three basic types of *abata* cloth. One had a predominantly red decoration, one a decoration of some complexity called *ifala* which incorporated much yarn of a pinkish shade obtained from the sheath of the guineacorn stalk, and the third, called *aponupony*, with a tapestry design on both sides. We were, unfortunately, unable to see a specimen of *aponupony* for ourselves. While we did not see this cloth, in any of its three forms, actually being woven, we were able to find a loom on which it had been made. This, to our surprise, turned out to be a vertical loom of the kind used by women. Our information, however, was firm that *abata* cloth was made by men and not by women. A piece of ancillary equipment connected with its manufacture was a peculiar little sword stick made of curved bone.

While associated with funerals, Bunu *abata* does not seem to be used as a shroud; rather, it can be displayed before the house of the deceased, draped over a pole, or it can be spread out on the roof, where it will remain for several days as part of a memorial ceremony which, in fact, may take place years after the actual death.

being remembered. Usually *abata* cloths are rented. For men of high status or wealth, however, *abata* cloths may be specially woven.

The Aworo, neighbours of the Bunu, also make use of *abata* cloth. Here the cloth appears to be of importance in certain masquerades of the *Egungun* type, ceremonies which may have been derived from Yoruba or Igbira practice. For this purpose *abata* cloths can form part of a masquerade costume.³⁰ There is evidence that *abata* cloth is still being made in the Aworo towns of Aiyeteju, Takete and Otafun. For masquerade purposes this cloth is sometimes sewn up with other materials. We noted an example from Takete in which the Aworo had combined *abata* with a strip of red with bluish warp stripes which looked very much like the *ore* of the Eloi, though the strip was rather wider.

Abata cloth appears to have travelled from the country of the Bunu and Aworo. The Igbira are said to use it for masquerade purposes as well as for funerals.

Notes

- ¹ S. F. Nadel, *A Black Byzantium*, Oxford 1942, p. 1.
- ² Ibid., p. 82. See also: A. C. G. Hastings, *The Voyage of the Dayspring*, London 1926, p. 90.
- ³ H. Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, London 1857-8, Vol. III, p. 128.
- ⁴ Nadel, op. cit., p. 279.
- ⁵ Nadel, op. cit., p. 242.
- ⁶ Nadel, op. cit., p. 279.
- ⁷ Barth, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 128.
- ⁸ Barth, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 129.
- ⁹ R. Hallett, ed., *The Niger Journal of Richard and John Lander*, London 1965, p. 109.
- ¹⁰ Barth, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 128.
- ¹¹ Barth, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 129.
- ¹² Barth, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 128.
- ¹³ For a survey of this kind of design, see: J. Gabus, *Au Sahara*, Neuchâtel 1958.
- For Hausa embroidery patterns and their names, see: D. H. Heathcote, 'Aspects of style in Hausa embroidery', *Savanna*, III, 1974; D. H. Heathcote, 'A Hausa embroiderer in Katsina', *The Nigerian Field*, XXXVII, 1972.
- ¹⁴ C. Larymore, *A Resident's Wife in Nigeria*, London 1908.
- ¹⁵ There is a particularly interesting collection of these garments in Liverpool, whose Museum has served as the repository of much West African material collected by merchants and sailors during the course of that City's long association with the West African Coast. We would like to thank Yvonne Schumann of Merseyside County Museums for letting us go through reserve collections and photograph them.
- ¹⁶ M. Laird & R. A. K. Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger in 1832, 1833, 1834*, 2 vols, London 1837, Vol. I, p. 429.

The Okpella, a northern Edo-speaking group, use this cloth in the costume of the *Alukpekpe* figure in the *Omeshe* masquerade. The costume here is essentially a long tube made up of alternate strips of *abata* and a red fabric woven by women on an upright loom.³¹

The presence of *abata* among the Okpella is of particular interest to the student of the history of Nigerian textiles. The Okpella are thought to have their cultural roots in Benin. Benin is the home of a very special weaving known as *Owina N'Ido* which is used to produce *iyerhuan* and other cloths reserved for the exclusive use of the Oba and his Chiefs and priests.³² The right to weave these cloths belongs to a guild of male weavers who, however, weave on a vertical loom of the basic pattern associated throughout Nigeria with women's weaving. On a technical analysis there certainly exist parallels between the thick weave and red hue of one of their special cloths (*egbele*) and the *abata* cloth discussed in this chapter. The work of the *Owina N'Ido* weavers is discussed in Chapter 12.

- ¹⁷ Barth, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 434.
- ¹⁸ Nadel, op. cit., p. 279.
- ¹⁹ Nadel, op. cit., p. 295.
- ²⁰ J. R. Wilson-Haffenden, *The Red Men of Nigeria*, London 1930, p. 45.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 78.
- ²² Cloth of this kind, used by the Jukun, is illustrated in: C. K. Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom*, London 1931, Pls. V, VI & XXXVIII.
- ²³ This section is based almost entirely on our field work in 1979.
- ²⁴ Wilson-Haffenden, op. cit., p. 43.
- ²⁵ O. Temple, *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria*, Lagos 1922, London 1965, p. 44.
- ²⁶ Temple, op. cit., p. 129.
- ²⁷ D. Forde, *The Yoruba-speaking peoples of South-western Nigeria*, London 1969, p. 74.
- ²⁸ Temple, op. cit., p. 71.
- ²⁹ We must express our appreciation of John Picton's knowledge of Nigeria, which he made freely available to us, and our gratitude for his help in enabling us to study and photograph the reserve collections of the Museum of Mankind (British Museum).
- ³⁰ Mrs J. Holmes saw such a masquerade near Insanlu in 1979.
- ³¹ See, for example: J. Borgatti, 'Okpella Masking Traditions', *African Arts*, July 1976.
- ³² See, for example: P. Ben-Amos, 'Owina N'Ido—Royal Weavers of Benin', *African Arts*, July 1978; P. Dark, *An Introduction to Benin Art and Technology*, Oxford 1973, pp. 66-9.
- See also: *Coronation of Oba Erediauwa*, Daily Times Publication, Lagos 1979, which has a picture of an *Owina N'Ido* weaver at work.
- See Chapter XII for some discussion of the *Owina N'Ido* weavers of Benin.



116 *A gate leading into the Emir's Palace in Kano.*

That area of northern Nigeria which is usually associated with the term 'Hausa' presents, in fact, at least in respect to the categories and distributions of peoples who occupy it, a most complex picture.¹ Many peoples of different origins have moved here over the centuries, both as conquerors and as migrant settlers; and old and new have often intermingled to an extent which has produced one of the most fascinating social patterns to be found in any part of West Africa. The area which concerns us in this chapter is indeed vast. An imaginary line bounding it would run more or less as follows: starting at a point to the south of Zaria and Kaduna, the border would run northeastwards to include Ningi and Potiskum, and then turn north to the Nigeria-Niger border north of Hadejia; the line would then run westwards along the international border (the peoples on the Niger side of which, though many of them undoubtedly falling more or less within the Hausa world, are not our concern in this book devoted to Nigeria) to a point northwest of Sokoto, whence it would return southeastwards to its starting point in the general Kaduna-Zaria region, taking in on its way the town of Kebbi. Within this great area, roughly triangular in shape, we can find, at least in so far as men's weaving is concerned, a Hausa heartland;

but it cannot be too much emphasized that Hausa weavers are to be found far away indeed from this heartland.

As is the case generally in this book, we have adopted the method of identification and classification as much according to the typology of weaving equipment as by the more orthodox criteria of language and social affinities. It has been our experience in Nigeria as elsewhere in West Africa that to the weavers concerned their loom is usually just a loom without a special name to distinguish it from other looms, a reasonable enough viewpoint. For purposes of classification, however, a name must be assigned to each individual loom type. The policy we have adopted here—and it is of particular importance when discussing the looms of Hausaland—has been either to name the loom after the dominant type of cloth it produces, which usually does have a specific name, or after some characteristic feature in the loom's construction or in its equipment. On this basis we have identified five major categories of loom in Hausaland. While they all share certain basic Hausa features, and while the division between categories may not always be as sharp as one might wish, yet we feel that the method is both useful and meaningful.

With the above considerations always in mind, our five main categories of looms in Hausaland are as follows:

- 1 the extremely narrow *turkudi* loom
- 2 the *zugu* and *sawaye* looms
- 3 the *mudukare* loom
- 4 the *luru* blanket loom
- 5 the very wide *chakerikeri* loom

In addition there is a type of loom scattered throughout this region which, while not strictly a narrow-strip horizontal loom as its product would be better classified as being braided rather than woven, is still used by men to produce such articles of everyday use as drawstrings, straps and girths; and it will receive some brief comment.

Our five major categories of loom all possess certain common features which serve to distinguish them from looms discussed in other chapters. The most easily recognized feature is the use of a single pole located directly behind the weaver to support heddles and beater. This can well be a naturally growing tree, or it can be a pole stuck into the ground and leaning or bending over the weaver's head. Looms in Sudanic regions adjacent to the Hausa, and which some observers have tended to lump together with the Hausa looms under the general heading 'Sudanic', do not possess this feature. It is absent, for example, in both the looms of the Songhai and Djerna (or Zerma) of Niger and the Kanuri loom of Borno. The pole, of course, can well be absent in a Hausa loom set up within a house: here the heddles and beater can be supported by a cord attached to the wall behind and above the weaver's head, much as in the Nupe loom. The natural environment for most West African narrow strip horizontal looms, however, is more or less in the open because of the space requirements of the stretched out warp and drag weight. It is reasonable, therefore, to seek the typical example, where possible, in a loom in a more or less open environment, with the caveat that some of the features noted here can be altered to meet the requirements of other environmental circumstances.

Another general Hausa feature is the method of attaching the breast beam by means of a pair of ropes attached to pegs in the ground located behind the weaver. It is tensioned in characteristic West African fashion by an iron bar running through a hole (one of a set of two holes at right angles to each other) in either end of the beam. In contrast, therefore, to the Yoruba,

Nupe and other looms already described, the Hausa loom lacks the wooden uprights used to support the breast beam; though there is a pair of forked poles to support the warp beam. The Hausa breast beam often has ends which are decorated with carved knobs.

Usually, Hausa looms have short side pedals attached to the heddles, but considerable variety is found. A characteristic feature of Hausa pedals is their attachment to the ground by means of cords fixed either to the warp beam supports or to pegs in the ground, these cords, in effect, echoing the path taken by the cords to the rear which locate the breast beam. The point where cord is attached to pedal provides a kind of radius control which helps determine the rather complicated path in three dimensions through which the pedal must move to work the heddles and make the shed.

It is likely that in the Hausa loom the oldest and most characteristic form of apparatus for enabling the two heddles to oscillate is a rocker, or horse, rather than a pulley. This device appears in many West African looms; but it does seem to be particularly common in its Hausa form, *shuwaka*. Many Hausa looms do make

117 Raw cotton being carried into the villages by Hausa farmers.





118 Two different types of Hausa looms situated side by side in Rika, near Kano. On the left is the wider *chakerikeri* loom, and on the right the narrower *laka* loom. Each uses the characteristic wooden pole to support the beddle frame.

use of pulleys, generally of metal with a nut wheel. The metal pulley holder can be turned into an object with considerable elaboration of decoration, the extreme being the device used by the *chakerikeri* weavers, whose genre we have named after the word they use for pulley. Other Hausa terms for pulleys are *chakeri* and *makerere*, both with a clear linguistic implication of being made by a blacksmith and not a weaver. Here, perhaps, is confirmation for the hypothesis that the rocker came before the metal pulley. We will return to

the question of pulleys when we come to discuss the *chakerikeri* weavers in a later section of this chapter.

Hausa warping up, *wadari*, involves two basic methods, one with the warps laid out on the ground as we have already noted with the Yoruba weavers, and the other with the warps strung up along walls, fences and even hedgerows. Something like this last has already been referred to in connection with Nupe. Warping up will be considered in greater detail later in this chapter in the section concerning Zaria.

These are common Hausa terms for loom parts:

masafi or *matsefi*—beater
alira—heddles
chakeri or *makerere*—pulley
koshiya—shuttle
shuwaka—rocker (horse)
jaki—warp beam
takala—breast beam
jana baya ('those that pull back')—ropes for attachment of breast beam
matuki—breast beam tensioning rod
mataki—pedals
kunkuru—drag weight

The weavers of Hausaland, in contrast to those discussed in other sections of this book, weave an amazing variety of cloths, in design, in width of strip, and in density or weight of weave. It is extraordinary that from this region come both the narrowest of strips, well under one inch in width, and also the widest, around two feet, all made on looms which are in many essentials the same, and also gauze-like veils and heavy blankets. One explanation, perhaps, is that we see here what might be termed a general textile industry catering for every possible kind of demand or need, while elsewhere cloths have tended to bear a close relationship to specific social and ritual functions. Even the Yoruba, the most prolific male weavers of southern Nigeria, while they have adapted their cloth to all sorts of uses, yet have retained certain characteristics of pattern and width of strip which makes their identification fairly easy. During our field work in 1978 and 1979 in northern Nigeria we encountered a staggering variety of cloth, much of which we were really quite surprised to find had a Hausa origin. The flexibility of the Hausa weaver has already been noted, for example, in the weaving of the basic cloth which the Gbari process into their distinctive *bubu* cloth. We observed an excellent instance of this diversity in 1978 when we found weavers at Rima Riki, near Kano, using all five of the major Hausa loom categories more or less side by side. We have seen nothing quite like this elsewhere in West Africa.

Much of Hausa weaving has its roots in the general pattern of rural life in northern Nigeria. There are some urban concentrations of Hausa weavers, of course; but there are far more weavers working either alone or in small groups in remote villages all over that area which I have termed heartland, as well as in districts far away

from it. These weavers are usually farmers as well; and their weaving is fitted into the seasonal pattern of the agricultural life, its proceeds being part of the farmer's general income. The use of the single pole, undoubtedly derived from a tree and still often just that, symbolizes clearly enough the roots of this craft in the country landscape. The Hausa weaving complex, in other words, spans the totality of Hausa life, from the remote farm to the environs of the Emir's Palace (where a few weavers may work to meet the needs of the Court), and from the settled town house (as, for example, in Zaria) to temporary groupings of migrant weavers under a grove of trees in the countryside convenient to some market. On the whole, weaving in Hausaland is more a rural than an urban craft. In Zaria we found a few weaving compounds, but nothing like the concentrations of weavers in a Yoruba town like Iseyin or Ilorin. Our work in Katsina and Sokoto revealed a handful of weavers, in Sokoto in a compound near the Emir's Palace; and in the old city of Kano we failed in 1978 and again in 1979 to find a single weaver, which does not, of course, mean that there were none, but rather suggests that they could not have been very common. Shea, a recent observer who spent a considerable time in the Kano region, likewise found weavers in that city to be singularly elusive.

Many of the rural weavers whom we encountered in Hausaland were old men. Everywhere we were told of the reluctance of boys to learn the craft, which had to compete in attraction with the opportunities offered by the fantastic economic development of northern Nigeria in recent years. Only among the users of the *chakerikeri* loom, usually migrants, did we find many young men employed in the craft. It is perhaps significant that these were producing cloths which competed directly with the product of the woman's upright loom, the use of which has certainly been on the increase in recent years. With this exception, our impression was that in much of Hausaland male weaving was very much on the decline, kept alive by certain highly specialized traditional uses such as the demand for white *sawaye* cloth for burial shrouds and other cloths still sought after by Saharan nomads. The fact that markets in the big cities like Kano contain much cloth can be misleading. These are really entrepôts for the collection and distribution of cloth through an elaborate system of subsidiary markets over a very wide area indeed; and, hence, the total quantity of cloth at the central market may in fact,

when interpreted in terms of numbers of weavers divided into the total collecting area, seem a bit on the meagre side. There can be little doubt, at all events, that the Kano cloth market which Barth saw in the middle of the last century was far more impressive than the display that we encountered in 1978 and 1979.

The narrow *turkudi* loom

This loom produces cloth which may be only half an inch in width, possibly the narrowest web produced anywhere on a horizontal loom today. The distribution of *turkudi* weaving is associated with centres of indigo dyeing, the most important of which in the present context are Kura, Gwarzo, Dawakin Tofa, Dawakin Kudu, Wudil, Kumbutso, Rano and Karaye in Kano State.²

The *turkudi* loom is tiny, at first sight almost a toy. In fact it is just a miniature version of the basic Hausa loom type with single pole and rope-secured breast beam. Apart from the extreme narrowness of the warp, the most striking feature of this loom is that the weaver sits with his legs over the breast beam. There is no heddle pulley, instead, a rocker or horse, *shuwaka*, is used, an oscillating bar connecting the pair of heddles. The use of a rocker rather than a pulley may, indeed, be an old Hausa feature. The *turkudi* loom has short pedals (*mataki* or 'the steps') tied at one end to the base of the uprights supporting the warp beam. The minute

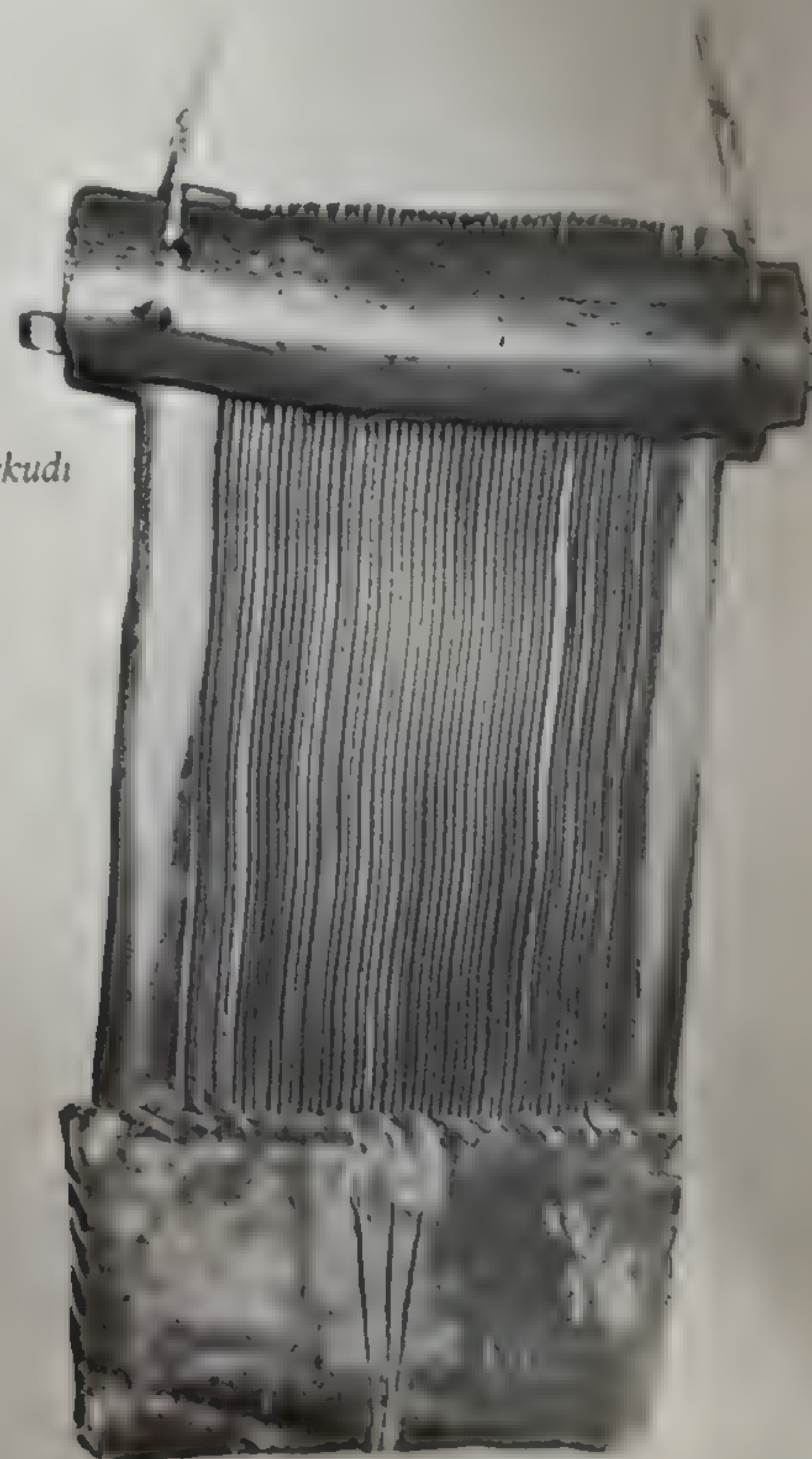
119 A Hausa *turkudi* loom, showing knee position over the breast beam, and the use of the *shuwaka* rocker bar. Kura.



warp is attached to a drag weight consisting of sand or small pebbles contained in an old enamelled metal plate. The warp can be located along the ground by means of hoops, sometimes made from motor car spring leaves. The beater used in the *turkudi* loom is quite distinctive. Three and a half inches across at the top, its widest point, it has a very light bowl bound in thin leather, a miniature version of standard Hausa practice. Its top, however, is unlike anything else we have seen in West Africa: the teeth or reeds protrude above the top binding which consists of two raffia palm bars loosely bound together with fine thread. The sides of the beater angle outwards from bottom to top. Threads wound round the bowl mark the mid point of the beater, no doubt as an aid to warping up. The closest parallel we have seen to this item of loom equipment is an old and traditional form of beater used by the Djerma in Niger; but here the bowl is closer to the Nupe (with a bundle of sticks) than to the Hausa type. The shuttle used in the *turkudi* loom, on the other hand, is identical to that used in the *zugu* and *sawaye* looms described in the next section of this chapter.

The main use of this loom is to produce the cloth for *turkudi* veils so beloved by the Tuareg, the Teda, various Arab groups in the Sahara and the Moors of Mauritania.³ The fame of the cloth among desert dwellers is of considerable antiquity. Barth was most enthusiastic about the amount of this valuable material in Kano market, where he stocked up with a supply for

120 Hausa *turkudi* beater, $3\frac{1}{2} \times 6$ inches. Kura.





121 The tiny Hausa *turkudi* loom situated under a Baobab tree in Kura, near Kano.

his journey to Timbuktu whither, we know, *turkudi* veils were exported from Kano in large quantities.⁴ In 1977 we found *turkudi* of Nigerian origin on sale at a wholesaler's stall in Niamey market in Niger and also, for retail to nomads, at the desert market of Filingué which lies on one of the old routes to the great Saharan trading centre of Agadès. Today the most important place in Nigeria for the manufacture of *turkudi* is probably Kura, a few miles southwest of Kano on the Zaria road.

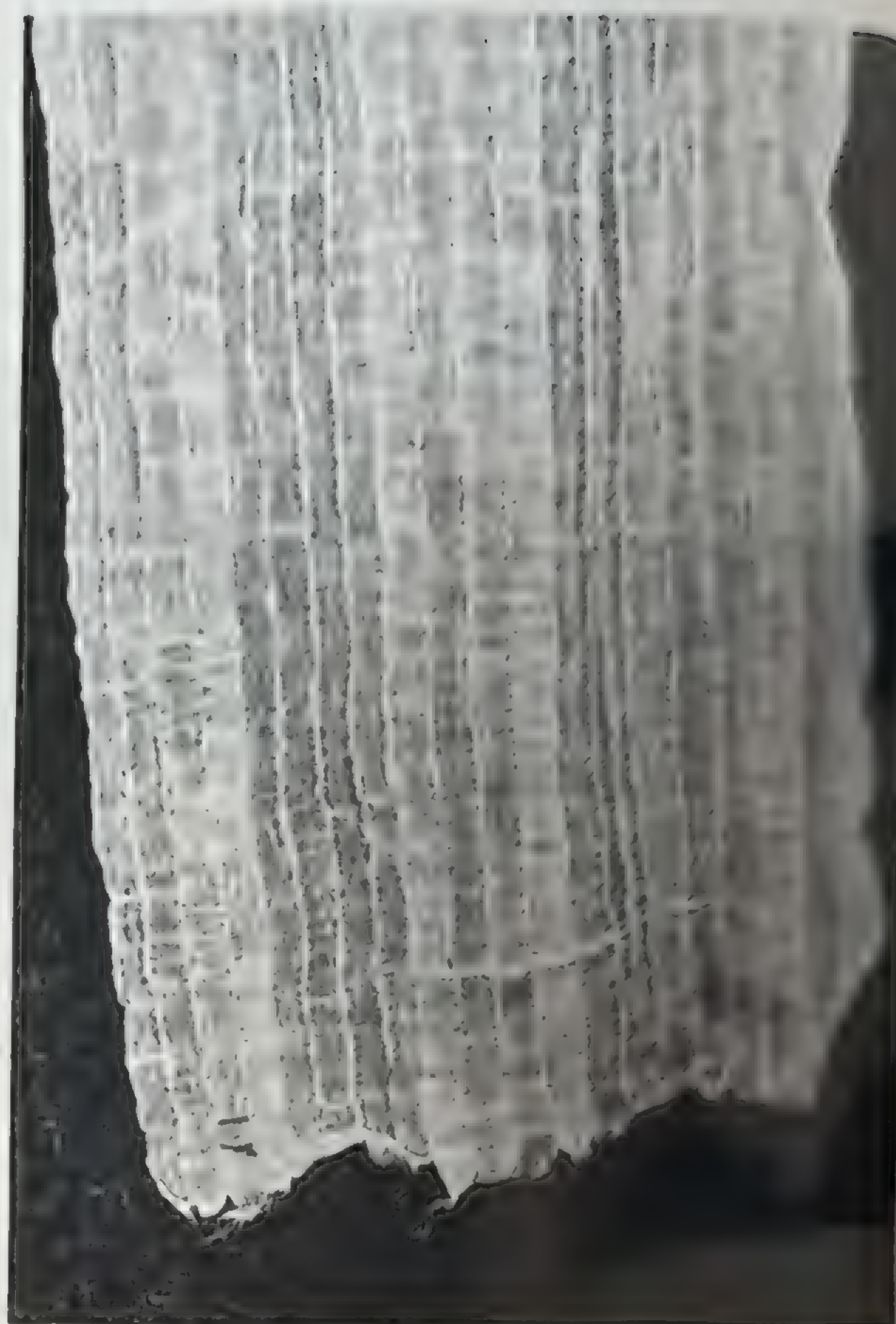
Around Kura, which we visited in 1979, women, often wives of weavers, spin cotton into a very fine yarn, the quality of yarn being a key element in *turkudi* cloth which, before dyeing and beating, should have a

delicate gauze-like texture. A *turkudi* warp can contain some 38 threads and a weft pick of 44 threads to the inch. Some poorer quality *turkudi* may contain a warp with as few as 28 threads; and we saw at Kura veils being made up from an alternation of strips of better and poorer quality. The weaver, coming to the end of his warp (which is usually calculated to suffice for one *turkudi* veil), may include a few coloured wefts in a characteristic trade mark which will serve to identify his work later on. After weaving, the strips, in lengths of 153 inches by our measurement, are sewn together selvedge to selvedge, 20 strips in all, to make up a veil. This work is executed by women. Twelve sewn *turkudi* veils are then sewn together into what looks like a double cloth with 120 strips on either side, a convenient form for subsequent processing. All this work, from spinning to sewing, is very much a family

split with work distributed between the men and the women.

The batches of *turkudi* veils are next sent to the dyers (*rankunbaba*). In the dyeing area of Kura, I counted 108 dye pits; but the chief dyer, Alhaji Umaru, told me that there were now only about twenty dyers actually working. I saw but ten dye pits in use, many of the remainder looking very decrepit indeed. At one time these pits, it seems, were made by sinking earthenware jars into the ground; but today they are usually (and at Kura certainly) simply holes dug in the ground and lined with a material for waterproofing known, so Shea says, as *laso*.⁵ In such pits the dye bath is prepared with water, ashes, dried indigo and a substance called *katsi*, the concentrated sludge taken from the bottom of dye pits. In addition, we noticed that the liquid contained quite a lot of imported indigo powder manufactured by Imperial Chemical Industries. I was told that it took ten days to get the bath ready for actual dyeing. Before being first immersed in the dye, the *turkudi* batches are wetted; but they are not given any special treatment with a mordant, for which purpose the ash mixed up in the dye serves. The *turkudi* batches are alternately dyed and sun dried over a ten day cycle, it being reckoned in Kura that at least ten dyeings are required to give the *turkudi* the required depth and density of indigo. Drying of *turkudi* batches takes place on horizontal poles located near the dye pits. Once the process of dyeing has been completed, the veils, still in their batches of twelve, are taken to the cloth beaters in another part of Kura. Here, two men seated on the ground in very dark rooms beat the cloth over a log of the Shea-butter tree, a piece of apparatus they call *mabuga*. During beating, the *turkudi* cloth is wrapped in another cloth so as to protect its rather fragile fibres. The beating implements are heavy wooden mallets known as *dambuga*.

Both dyers and cloth beaters in Kura handle material other than *turkudi*. In the dye pits much yarn destined for less specialized fabrics than *turkudi* is treated. A cloth beating process which I was shown by a most skilled craftsman, Alhaji Uba, involved the turning blue of *riga* robes. What happened here was that colour was literally beaten into a white garment, using a concentrated indigo dye paste called *shuni*. Beating is also used to finish cloth dyed by other means; to give it texture and gloss. *Riga* dyed in this manner enjoy a distribution in the Sahara similar to that of *turkudi*; and they must be considered to be closely related to the *turkudi* industry. In 1977 at Filingué market in



122. Gauze-like Hausa *turkudi* veil, sewn from twenty half-metre strips seen here before dyeing. Kura.

Niger we found these blue *riga* on sale to the nomads. From the point of view of the student of textiles these *riga* are peculiarly unpleasant garments. Everything that comes in contact with them turns blue; and they must be handled and stored with considerable care. However, to the nomad purchaser in the Sahara this can often be a most desirable feature: the Tuareg delight in giving a blue tint to their skins.

Shuni paste is used as a final stage in *turkudi* preparation, beaten in just as with the *riga*, to impart a metallic gloss to the fabric and, also, the quality of turning everything that it touches blue. The Kura cloth beaters told me that, on the whole, they found that the 'tin' indigo worked as well, if not better, than the traditional *shuni* paste.

A final stage in the manufacture of *turkudi* is its folding and wrapping. The twelve *turkudi* in a batch are first separated. Each individual *turkudi* is then folded over lengthwise so that it now measures just over 76 inches. This is again folded lengthwise to

123 Hausa cloth beaters (*tunkunbaba*) working here on a *turkudi* veil. The bronze-like sheen is achieved when *shuni* paste dye is added to the cloth during the beating process. Kura



124 Shiny finished *turkudi* veil after beating and folding.



more times to a final length of about 18 inches, and then folded laterally to a final width of about 2 inches. The folding process is accompanied by beating. The final form of the *turkudi* is something like an 18 inch bar of rectangular section, about $1\frac{1}{2} \times 2$ inches, which is carefully wrapped in paper and then bound up in a strip of poor quality white cotton of narrow *turkudi* width. These are further bound into bundles of four; and in this form they find their way to the remotest corners of the Western Sahara where they are known as bundles of *shegga*, a word which Briggs states is Tamaheq of Sanhadjan-Berber origin and which, it is probable, is what Al Bakri in the eleventh century AD meant by *chigguiya*.⁶

There appears to be no rural Nigerian demand for *turkudi*. It has, however, found its way into certain Fulani Court uses and, as such, is marketed in Kano under the name *hajiya*, with an implication of a role in the Haj. Turbans of this material, known as *rowani*, are worn on occasion by Fulani Emirs and officials. According to Madauci this kind of turban is worn by the *zagi* (Court retainers or bodyguards) at the *Eid* ceremonies.⁷ The cost of this cloth, even in Nigeria near to its centre of production, is so high that its use is very much on the decline even among the wealthiest peoples.

In the Sahara the cost of *turkudi* is almost incredible. In 1977, when we found some for sale at Filingué market in Niger, we optimistically proposed to acquire a bundle of four only to find that, even after the most prolonged bargaining we could not lower the price below 100,000 CFA Francs for the bundle of four: we had to content ourselves with but a single specimen. On examination this has turned out to be of slighter better quality than the *turkudi* we saw being made at Kura, having no less than thirty strips of a width below $\frac{1}{2}$ inch; but the Kura products fetch comparable prices. Cost of this magnitude, however, does not deter the nomads, above all the Tuareg, whose animal herds still make at least some of their number wealthy in real terms in a world becoming increasingly short of protein.

The relationship between Kura, one of the homes of *turkudi*, and the Tuareg is of great interest. What we see today is a relic of the great age of trans-Saharan trade when merchants from the Kano region could well have had branch offices or associates in Saharan towns like Agadès. During the nineteenth century there appears to have been a southward movement of some Tuareg groups towards what is today Nigeria; and



125 A Djemma saddle cloth in which *turkudi* strips have been incorporated into the appliqué design. Niamey, Niger.

some settled in Kano Emirate. This process certainly served to reinforce the Saharan connections of places like Kura. Shea, for example, reports that he was told by one dyer that one group of dyers in that town are descended from men of Agadès, and that even now some Kura dealers in dyed cloth owned houses in Agadès.⁸ There can be no doubt that Agadès is the most important single Saharan outlet for *turkudi*, where it would seem, still, they play a part in barter in another ancient Saharan trade, that in salt.

The Tuareg make a number of uses of *turkudi* or *shegga*. Its acquisition is a sign of wealth. It is given at weddings and other ceremonies. Tuareg men wear it as a face veil, the *tagelmoust* (or, in Arabic, *litham*), with which they conceal the lower part of their faces.⁹ Tuareg women use it for head coverings, shawls and other garments. While other Saharan peoples also use this material, for the Tuareg it has acquired something of the property of a national dress; and it is a fascinating instance of the conservatism, as well as complexity, of life in the Western Sudan that a people who occupy territory stretching far north into Algeria should rely on such remote craftsmen as the weavers of places like Kura for garments of this kind.

Another group occupying the fringes of the Sahara in Nigeria and Niger who use *turkudi*-like strips in their garments are the Bororo Fulani.¹⁰ Young men of this group place great value on a very simple sleeveless smock made from this material, again of the deepest indigo blue. Examples of this garment which we were able to examine in Niamey in 1977 were made from a strip even narrower than that which we later saw being manufactured in Kura. Like the *turkudi* veil, these Fulani smocks are extremely expensive. Evidence suggested that they, too, used strips of Nigerian origin even if the sewing might have been carried out in Niger. This same very narrow blue strip also turns up in Niger in the decoration of saddle blankets, of which we found an excellent example in Niamey. No doubt it has other uses.

According to Shea, whose Ph.D. thesis is a most useful source of information on Hausa dyeing and related industries, some of the output in another *turkudi* centre in Hausaland, Dal, is used to make up gowns much sought after by the Kanuri in Borno. These, known as *kore* and *laiama*, are of poorer quality strip than goes into the valuable *turkudi* sought by the Tuareg; but they involve the same methods of weaving

and dyeing. There are Hausa traders in Maiduguri who specialize in this particular business. As we will see in another chapter, Borno is also a region where very narrow strips are woven, both by Kanuri weavers and by Hausa settlers. The Kanuri certainly appreciate shrouds, known in Hausa as *likkafani*, made from very narrow white strip; and the narrowest strip in a shroud which we saw in Nigeria, well under one inch wide, was found in Maiduguri market, though probably not of Kanuri manufacture. There is an interesting relationship here between the product of the *turkudi* loom and Kanuri taste which requires further investigation. It might well throw light on the earlier history of the whole narrow strip complex in West Africa.

It is not open to doubt that the *turkudi* or *shegga* is a very old cloth. Briggs argues that the Tuareg *tagelmoust* could well date back to that period when cotton first appeared on the southern fringes of the western Sahara, perhaps quite early in the Christian era;¹¹ and it is probable that the face veils of Saharan dwellers mentioned by Al-Bakri in the eleventh century AD were of this material as were the veils and other garments noted by Ibn Battuta nearly three centuries later near Timbuktu.¹² It could well be that the Hausa *turkudi* industry, still to be seen in active operation in Nigeria today, is over a thousand years old. If so, it must represent one of the longest runs of a textile fashion in human history.

A study of *turkudi* raises, inevitably, two questions. First: why manufacture so narrow a strip, involving so much labour and expense, when a wider strip would do as well? After all, veils to keep out the desert sand do not have to be made from strips about half an inch

wide; and Hausa looms, as we shall see, are perfectly capable of a strip over two feet in width. The answer here must lie in standards of value, taste and tradition rather than in practical considerations of a technical nature. Second: why only in Hausaland and in neighbouring Borno, very much under Hausa influence in this respect, do we find a strip so narrow? If the nomad market of the Sahara created such a demand for this material, why did not other weaving groups, along the desert fringes of the Western Sudan, in Mali for instance, compete as they have competed in the market for blankets?

While these questions are not so easy to answer in detail, in general they pose no insuperable problems. Traditionally, and until relatively recently, in northern Nigeria and adjacent regions narrow plain white cotton strip, usually carried in tightly rolled wheels, served as money and has variously been referred to as *dindi*, *dandi*, *windy* or *wendy*. This usage certainly dates back to the very early days of caravan contracts across the Sahara. The *turkudi* veil, in fact, was made of money and, moreover, in its packaged form, the bound and wrapped veil in its bundle of four, it served yet again as a means of exchange in the Saharan salt trade. To wear a *riga* of very narrow strip or to cover the face with a veil of *turkudi* was to make as clear a display of wealth as one finds among other peoples in other continents who wear necklaces or belts of gold or silver coins. Given this particular value system, it is not hard to imagine why place of manufacture should be crucial, material from other than the traditional sources being, in a sense, counterfeit. One can find other examples of this general kind of phenomenon in the history of money: the survival of the Maria Theresa Dollar could well be a case in point. The question of the use of cloth as money will be touched upon again in subsequent chapters.

The zugu and sawaye looms

These two varieties of Hausa loom can for convenience be considered together, the *sawaye* loom being but an enlargement of the *zugu* loom. The *zugu* loom produces strips between one and two inches wide, while the *sawaye* loom produces rather wider strips, between three and five inches.

Zugu looms are well represented in the triangle marked out by Kano, Katsina and Sokoto; and in 1978 we found cloth from this type of loom on sale in villages in the neighbourhood of Anka, Bungudu,



126 A roll of Hausa zugu cloth. This pattern is the common saki blue and white. The web is 1½ inches wide. Sokoto.

Kaura Namoda, Tsagero, Batsari, Jibya and Shinkafi, in other words in a fair cross section of the northwestern corner of Hausaland. We met a small group of weavers using this loom near the Emir's Palace in Sokoto, four of whom were working in one shed while the remainder were outside their houses. One from this group, Alliu Rasaki, who gave us much information, was himself weaving a *saki* strip (the Hausa equivalent of the Yoruba *etu*, the guineafowl pattern) about two inches wide



127 A typical Hausa zugu loom. Note raised position of seated weaver, and use of toe sticks in a shallow pit. Sokoto.

The *zugu* loom has the characteristic single upright for heddle and pulley support, and the rope attachment for the breast beam. Its distinguishing features are two very thin uprights, spaced close together, to support the warp beam in front of the weaver. The gap between these posts is about eight inches only; and the warp beam is placed exceptionally high in relation to the seated weaver: it is about level with his face. The beater, while of the basic Hausa design with flat,

leather-covered bowl, is very narrow, three and a half or so inches wide. The pulley (*chakeri*) is a small and simple device, a horseshoe shaped metal strip holding a wheel made from a nut (a common practice in West Africa). The pedals may be toe grips made from short sticks rather than the more usual Hausa form of sideways-facing pedals with one end on the ground and usually located by cords attached to either pegs or the front uprights. One can, however, find pedals using stones instead of cords as fulcrums, in this and other Hausa loom types. The weaver sits, generally, on a low seat in a posture far more upright than that in the *turkudi* loom; and to allow sufficient movement for pedals or toe grips there may be a pit dug in the ground just in front of the front uprights supporting the warp beam. The dragstone can consist of weights placed in a section of tree trunk cut longitudinally and hollowed out into something rather like a barge. The breast beam can be located either above the weaver's lap or below his knees, its position probably depending upon the width of the strip being woven. A very narrow strip, for the same quantity of yarn, will make a wheel on the breast beam of far larger diameter than a wider strip, in which case the position below the knees allows a greater clearance. There are certain features of this loom, in particular the pit beneath the weaver's feet when that is present, which remind one of looms of the Djerma and Songhai in neighbouring Niger. The strip woven on the *zugu* loom may approach in narrowness that made on the *turkudi*, the main distinguishing feature being the much

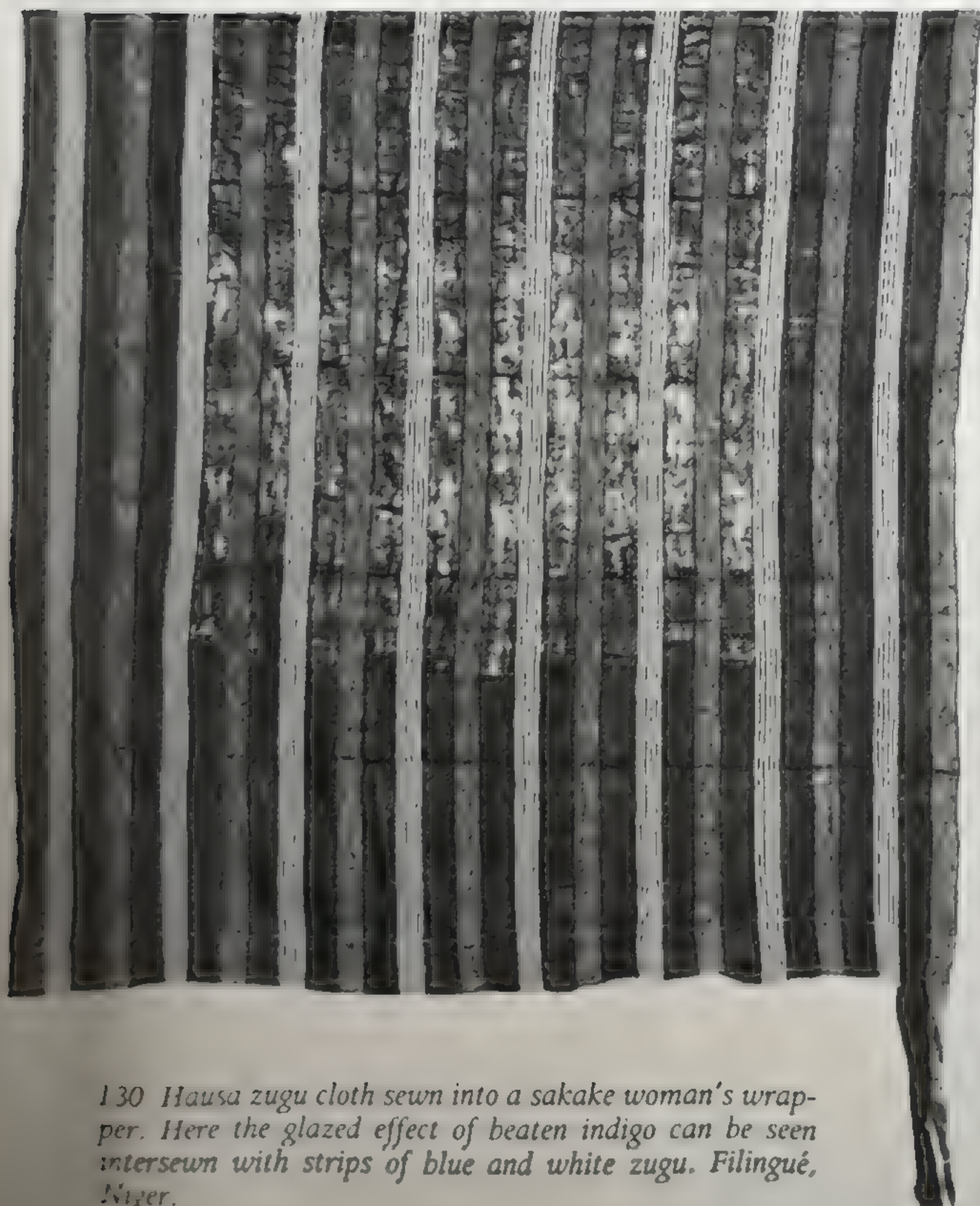


128 Hausa zugu leather-bound beater. 129 Iron pulley. Sokoto

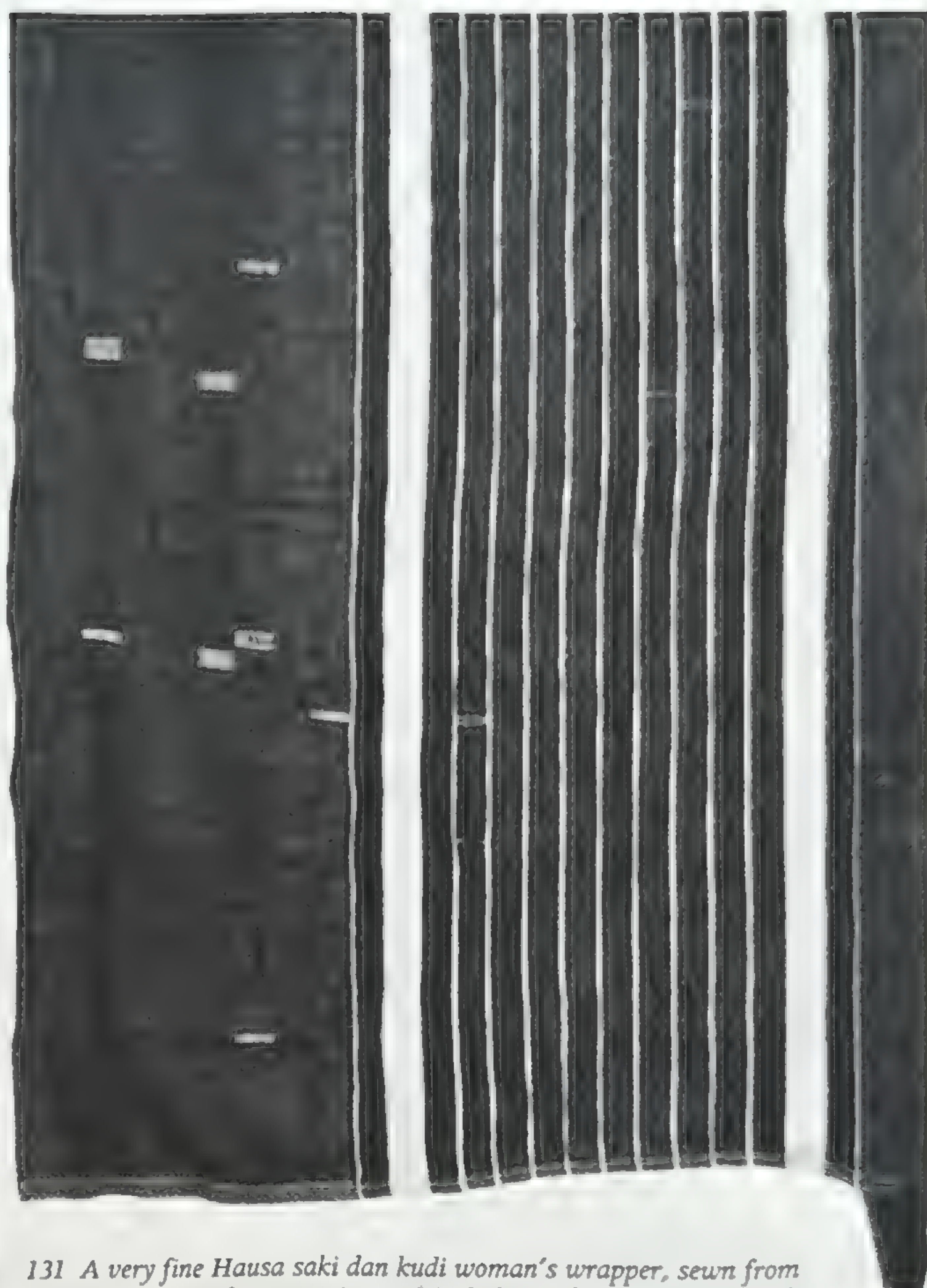
weightier weave of the *zugu* strip, due to denser warp and weft.

Zugu strips usually measure one to two inches in width, with some 60 warp threads per inch and a weft pick of about 25 to the inch. The strip with a pattern called *zugu*, whence comes the name for the genre, is a plain blue indigo with a beaten gloss. Other types include plain white, *pari* or *fari*, and the classic *saki*. We also saw a plain blue strip with white borders, a dark blue strip with five warp bands of a lighter blue, and some patterns of this type with vestigial inlay wefts scattered at random through the strip. There was also a red strip, generally of camwood-dyed colour but also of *alharini*, called *majige*. Strips containing *alharini* yarn were considered to be of particular value, both social and financial: they were known collectively as *saki dan kudi*, literally 'woven with money'.¹⁴

Zugu strip can be found in most northern markets, sometimes sold in loose bundles but, more characteristically, wound tightly into wheels. We encountered in 1979 in Zaria market two dealers in this material who said that they came from Sokoto and specialized in *zugu* which they sold in markets over a wide area. The



130 Hausa *zugu* cloth sewn into a *sakake* woman's wrapper. Here the glazed effect of beaten indigo can be seen intersewn with strips of blue and white *zugu*. Filingué, Niger.



131 A very fine Hausa *saki dan kudi* woman's wrapper, sewn from different patterned *zugu* strips and including inlays of gold thread. Bungudu.

main use of the strip is for sewing up into women's garments called *sakake* or *zane*, the last name being used if the cloth has some colour in it, which probably explains the term *zane* or *zenne* as meaning a coloured striped cloth. These garments, of the form of rather short wrappers, can vary enormously in quality. Inferior examples travel widely: we saw some on sale at Filingué market in Niger where they were being bought by Tuareg and other nomad women. Popular in this context was a crude copy of *saki dan kudi* using an alternation of poor *majige* and *saki* strips. *Zugu* strips are also made up into men's hats, particularly a type with ear flaps worn both by Hausa and Fulani in the Sokoto region; they are used in the manufacture of triangular undergarments known as *bante*; and they can be turned into the little cloth pockets which women wear beneath their wrappers as secure repositories for coins and notes.



130 Indigo-dyed cloth with zugu pattern

131 A Hausa dyer working at the deep dye pits



Some designs of the blue *saki* and *zugu* patterns, however, appear to be thought by some to have a monetary quality associated with the blue dye and, in particular, with *shani* paste. There may well be here some indication of the importance attached to indigo blue cloth by such non-weaving consumers of Hausa textiles as the Tuareg. *Zugu* strip also seems to have some monetary significance, perhaps an echo of the old tradition of cloth money. It is frequently used, for example, in the payment of midwives. It can also figure in the naming ceremonies for children and, especially in the form of *saki dan kudi* wrappers, it makes a most acceptable marriage gift: as many as sixty such wrappers can be given by a husband as wealth.¹⁵

The *sauwaje* cloth is woven in a strip rather wider than *zugu*, between three and five inches. It is a general purpose material found throughout Hausaland and is defined as the Hausa heartland as well as among emigrant Hausa weavers beyond their borders. Traditionally of hand spun cotton, it is most commonly in plain white or plain indigo blue, though there is a repertoire of other designs. With hand spun *gudu* two types of thread are used: *zari* for the warp, made of tighter and stronger spin and using rather more cotton; *abawa* for the weft, thicker but more loosely spun. On a warp width of three and a half inches there are usually some 76 warp threads and a weft pick of 16 to the inch. The weave is rough and loose when newly woven, but compacts considerably after washing to become a fabric capable of very hard wear.

The name *sauwaje* means a particular length measure of cloth strip; and this is a strip which is measured not by the measure rather than in the terms of body measurements. It is usually displayed in the market, however, in a special manner rather like a series of steps, each representing a slightly longer measure than the one above it: the idea is that the buyer can select the length without upsetting the whole arrangement. The measuring system is based on parts of the body: arm span (*gurfani*); hand span (*taki*); elbow to fingertip (*kamu*); and double arm span (*gaba*). *Sauwaje* cloth can be marketed in small wheels in the market, but the wheels, of course, are a feature of many West African markets outside Nigeria.

131 A Hausa dyer working at the deep dye pits in Kuruwa market in Kano



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135 A Hausa turkudi veil, seen here being worn by a Zagi Court retainer in Katsina.

136 Packets of exported Hausa turkudi veils wrapped in their traditional bindings, on sale in Filingué market in Niger. Desert markets such as this represent the main outlet for these veils, where they are known to the Tuareg as shegga.





137 A migrant Hausa weaver near Abuja still weaves in his original *turkudi* style, with his legs over the breast beam, although he is now producing typical *sawaye* three-inch strips.

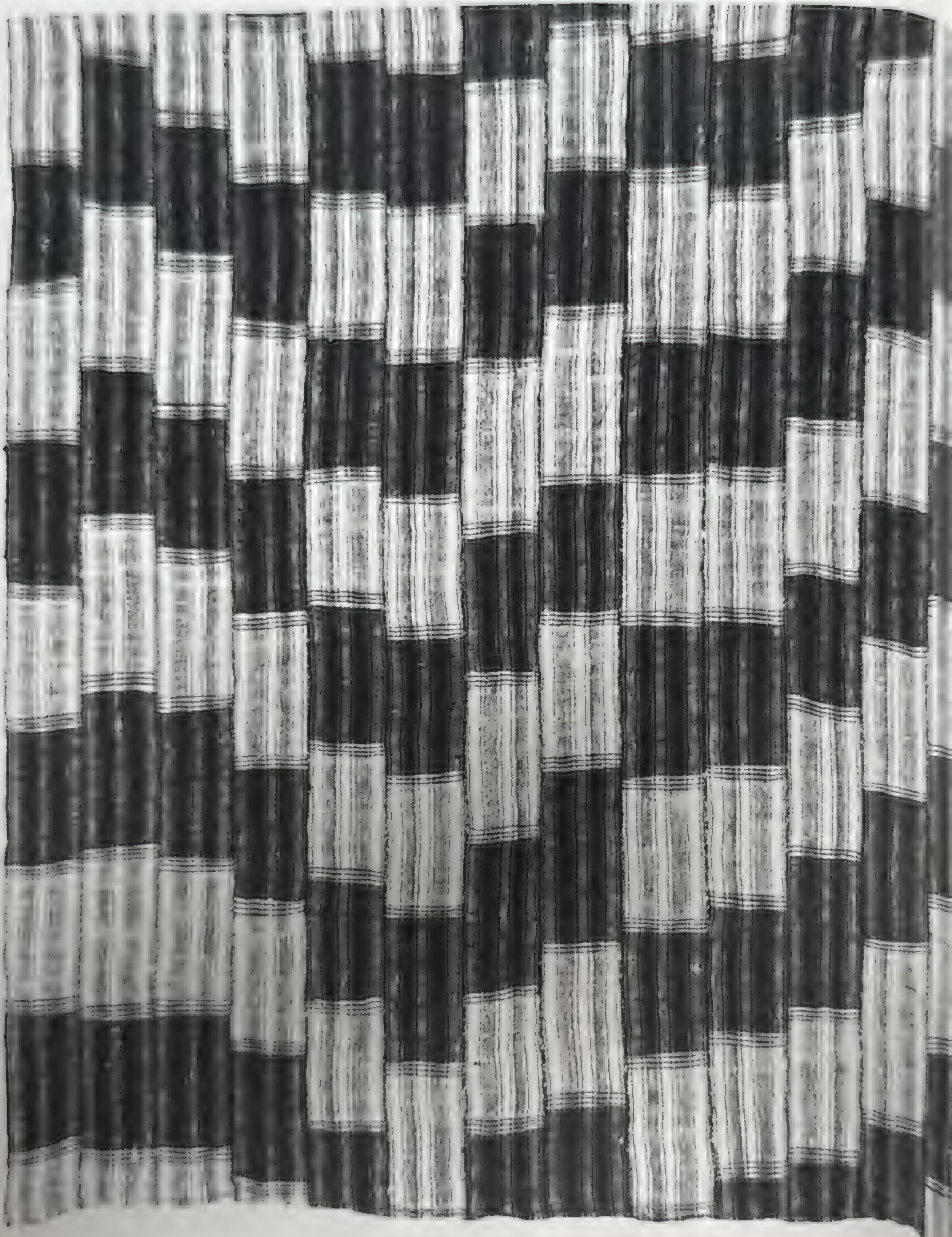
138 Soft hand spun cotton, blue and white striped Hausa *gwanda* cloth from the Kano countryside.

The basic *sawaye* is of unbleached white cotton and known as *fari*. The *fari* strip may have a very thin (four warp threads) red stripe down its centre which adds to its value. When dyed indigo blue, the *sawaye* strip is called *baki*; with blue and white warp stripes, it is known as *gwanda*, a confusing term meaning simply 'woven cloth' and also used for the product of the woman's vertical loom; with a small blue and white check it is, not surprisingly, known as *saki*. There is also a pattern consisting of blocks of weft to produce large checks which may be randomly distributed or may create a regular overall effect: the design is known as *arkilla*.¹⁶

The system used in naming Hausa cloths can be rather confusing. Male garments, for instance, tend to be named by the type of garment rather than the cloth from which it is made: thus the essential point about a *riga* is that it is a *riga*. For women's clothes the same name can be used both for the cloth and the garment made from that cloth. Thus *arkilla* can either be a particular wrapper or a particular design of *sawaye* strip used for making that wrapper.



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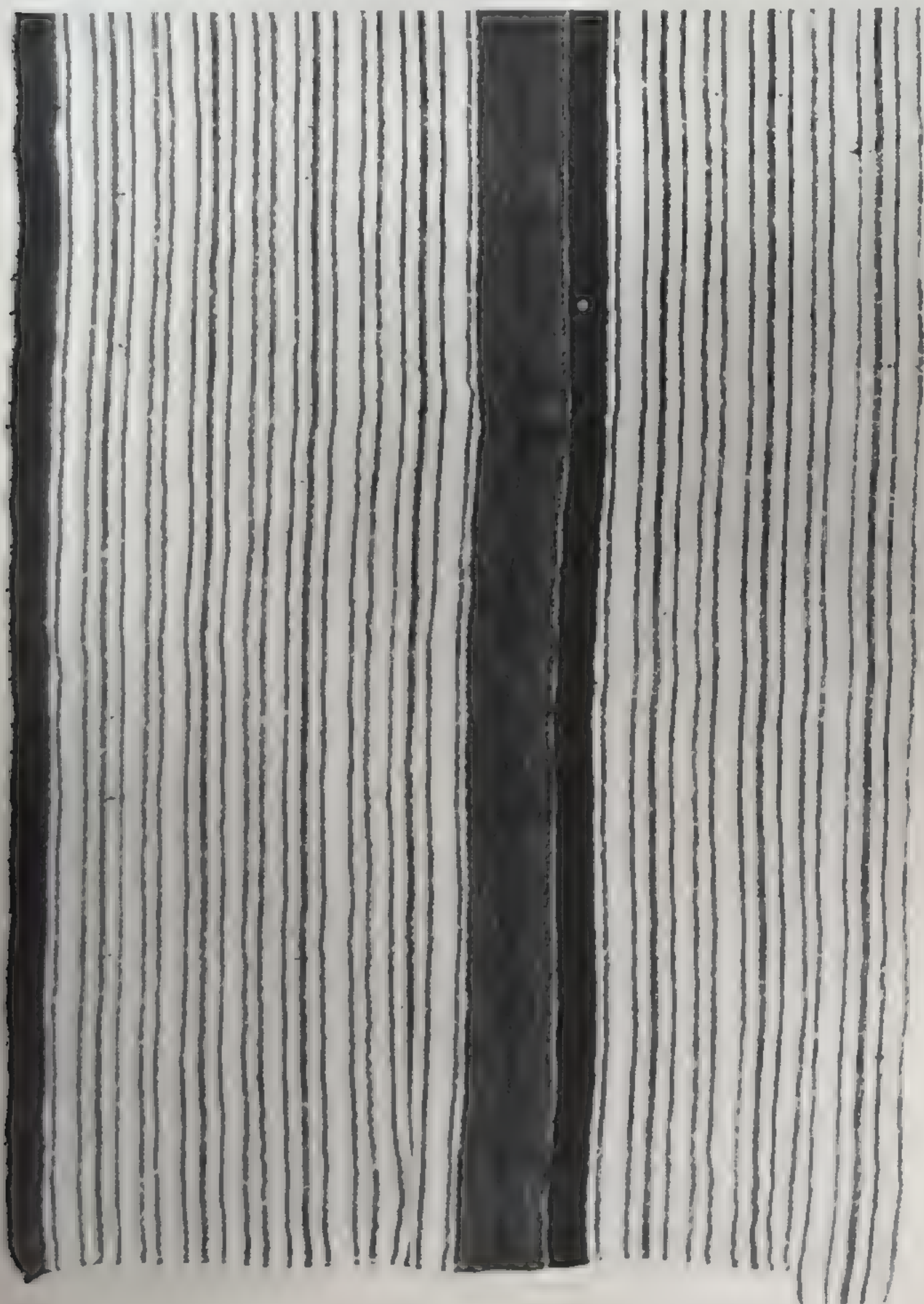


139 Example of the Hausa arkilla pattern, shown here on a hand spun woman's wrapper from Sokoto.

Arkilla, as a design, is of great interest. Usually it is marketed in the form of a pair of wrappers, each with thirteen strips of four inches width and two yards length. The pattern, of bold blocks or checks, can be provided with parallels from elsewhere in West Africa. In 1971 we obtained a cloth of this design from Koupèla in Upper Volta, woven by the local Mossi, which almost exactly matched examples which I saw in Nigeria in 1978 and 1979. Similar designs are to be found, also, among the Mamprussi and Gonja in Ghana. The implication of some kind of cross-fertilization of style between northwestern Nigeria and regions to its west are indeed quite strong.

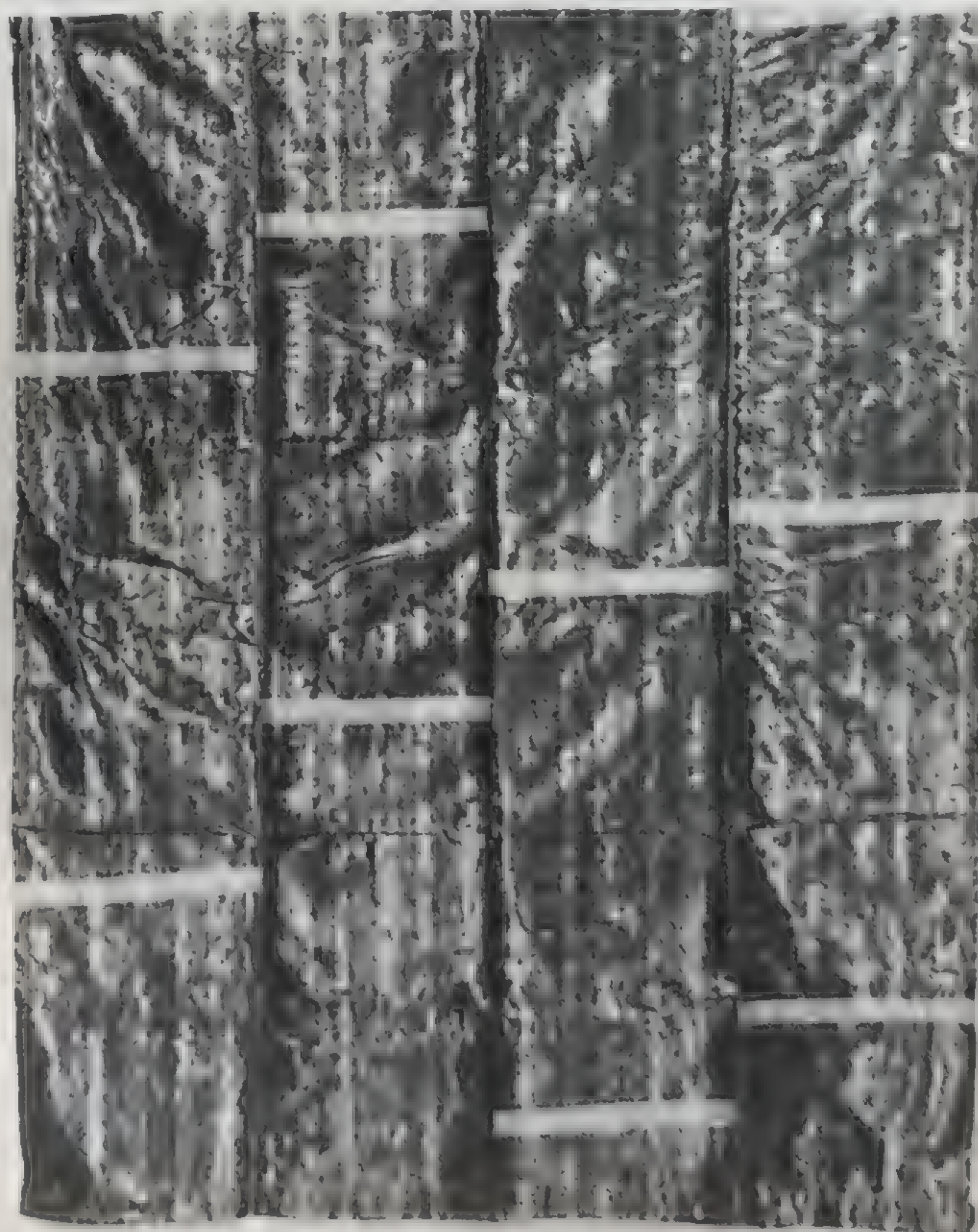
In 1978 and 1979 in the old Kurume market in Kano we encountered what must be a new development in *sawaye* weaving, the use of glittering metallic thread of synthetic fibre or treated cotton which both the Yoruba and the Hausa call *siliki*, combined with normal machine spun cotton yarn. The main source of this cloth, we were told, was in the neighbourhood of Zaria; but it seemed that some weavers in villages near Kano were also using this yarn. The probability was that here was an attempt to compete with Yoruba *aso oke* containing *siliki* yarn which can also be found in

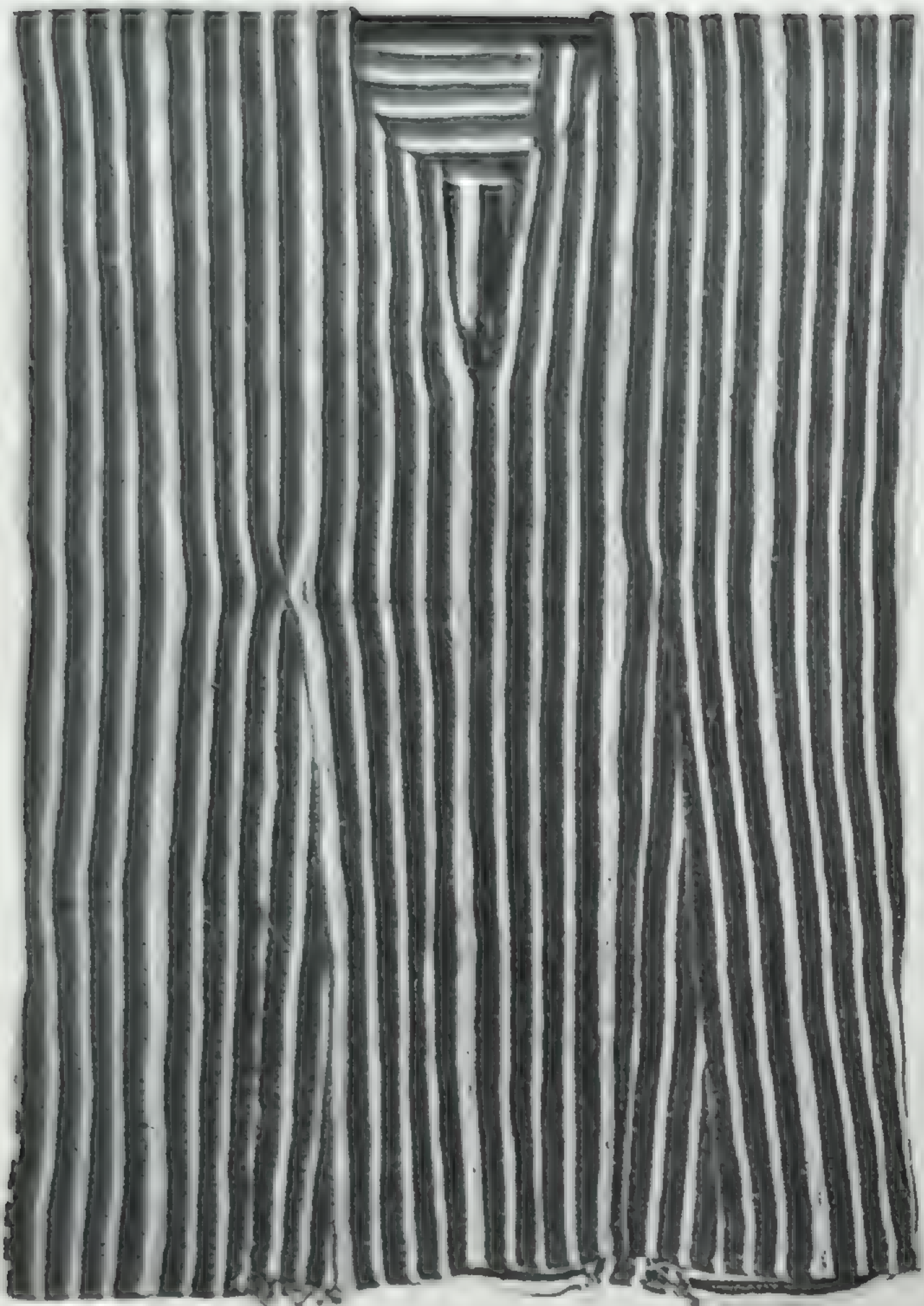
140 Hand spun cotton wrapper known as *gwanda*, from Sokoto.



141 Hausa *sakake* wrapper sewn from strips of blue *sawaye*, interwoven with strips of *saki* and *gwanda sawaye*. Katsina.

142 *Siliki* yarn is now woven into these shiny modern Hausa cloths.





143 A traditional Hausa taguwa sewn from gwanda strips. Zaria.

144 Hausa triangular underwear, known as bante, sewn from rather unusual check sawaye cloth. Katsina.

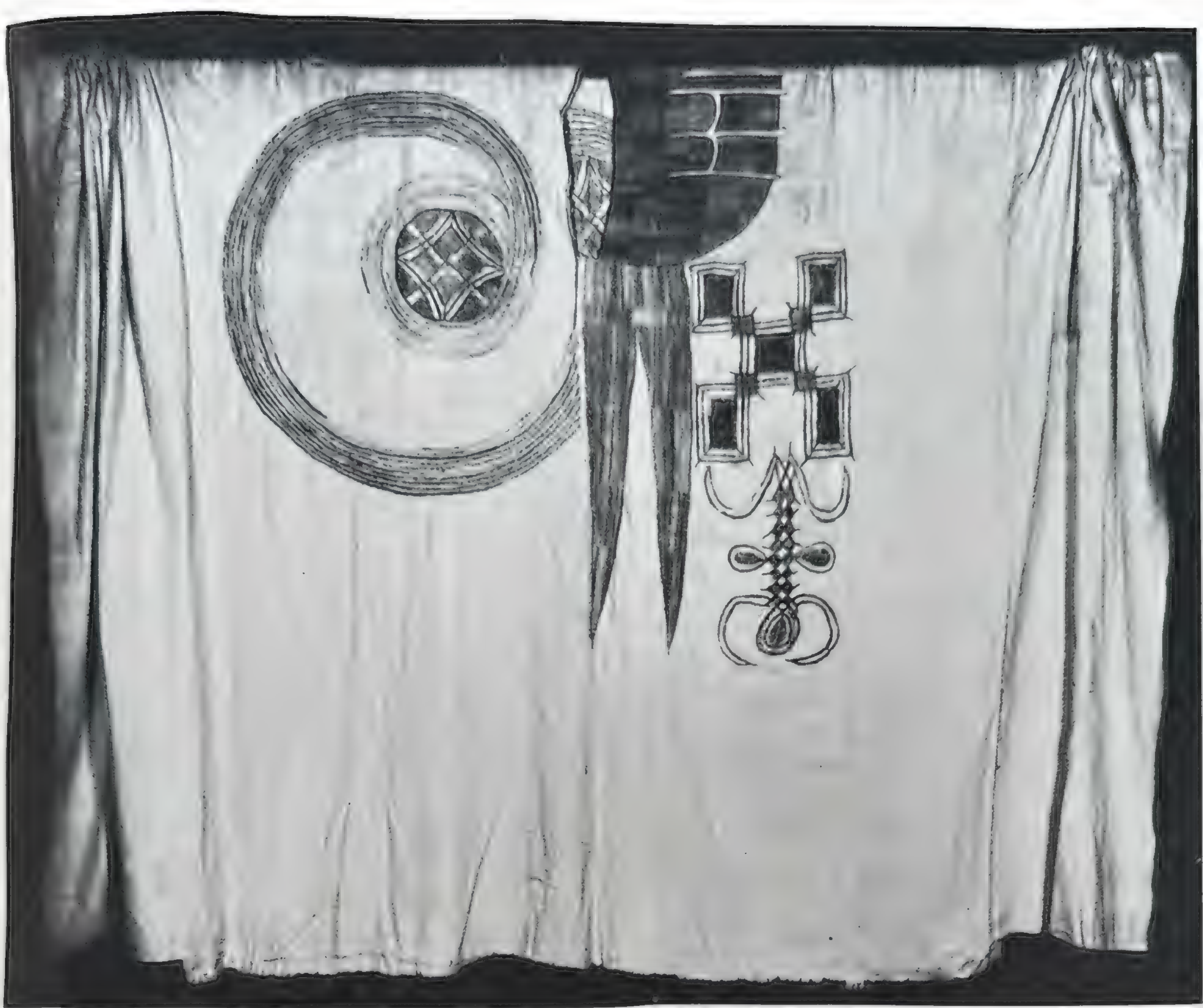


some quantities in northern markets. The *sawaye* with *siliki* was generally of poorer quality than the corresponding cloth of Yoruba make.

Sawaye cloth can be made up into all the major categories of Hausa garments. We have already encountered the *riga*, the large robe the embroidering of which was such a feature of the craftsmen of Bida. There are also a number of smock-like garments, *taguwa* and *gambari*, which can turn up in the market, sometimes rather garishly embroidered by machine. Certain smocks of this type have a special character designed to appeal to the pastoral Fulani. Some are today embroidered in imported wool with dyes which may be far from fast. *Sawaye* is used for trousers and for *bante*, the latter often made from a variety of *sawaye* pattern strips and lined with plain *fari*. Underwear of the *bante* form occurs not only in Hausaland but also far to the west. We have seen many examples from Niger, Upper Volta and northern Ghana.

An extremely important use of *sawaye* is in the manufacture of shrouds, in Hausa *likkafani*. Many of the plain white *riga*, with or without embroidery, sold in markets not only in northern Nigeria but also in Niger, are destined either directly or ultimately to be used for funerary purposes; and there are *riga*-like garments, with neither embroidery nor neck opening, which can have no other possible function. One of the narrowest of narrow-strip garments which we found in Nigeria (in Maiduguri market, with a strip well under one inch) was in this category, though the loom of its manufacture would more properly be in our classification *zugu* rather than *sawaye*. *Likkafani* of this general kind we saw on sale in markets in Yola, Gombe, Bauchi and Potiskum as well as in Maiduguri: and no doubt they were available in Kano market as well. There was a stall in the central market in Niamey, which we visited in 1977, which carried a large stock of these funeral garments. The customary demand for this kind of cloth, in Hausaland as elsewhere in Nigeria, provides a major incentive for the survival of traditional weaving of white, hand spun, cotton strip. Some of the cloths intended for this use have been impregnated with a chalky substance. There are specialist long distance Hausa traders, *fatauci*, who earn their living by the distribution and retail sale of these *likkafani*.

The *sawaye* loom is essentially the same as the *zugu* loom, which is why we have omitted here a detailed description of it. It is larger; but in general arrange-



145 Type of Hausa white riga shroud, known as likkafani. The motifs are in the Borno style and many such shrouds are exported to Borno. The embroidery is roughly sewn with coarse brown cotton, and the cloth is impregnated with powdered chalk.

ment, weaver's seating position, beater, pulley and pedals for the heddles, it is much the same. One is derived from the other, the historical order of the process depending ultimately upon an unknown: which came first, the narrower or the wider strip.

The mudukare weavers

Among this group of Hausa weavers we can find several variant loom types; but all can be treated together in that they produce much the same cloth, *mudukare*, woven in many parts of northern Nigeria to meet, in particular, the demand of the Bororo Fulani. The name *mudukare*, for those with sufficient energy to trace it through Abraham's Hausa dictionary,

146 Hausa bale cloth being produced at Kumpada, near Garko.





147 Hausa bale cloth, sewn into a typical smock worn by farmers and Fulani herdsmen, called a *gambari* or a *bundejuma*.

equates with *Barahaje*, a Fulani clan, a good enough indication of the specialized market for this fabric. There is a major concentration of *mudukare* weavers in the Wudil area including such villages as Kumpada, Kwana Garko, and in most of the countryside between Wudil Garko and Gano.

The head of one such weaving family in Kumpada, Sale Isiaco Guriya, was particularly helpful in giving information about his craft. He said that there were several hundred weaving families in his district, all producing a type of cloth called *bale* which was intended expressly for the migrant Fulani. The cloth was taken to a major market at Garko, where it was either sold by middlemen or by the weavers direct to the Fulani pastoralists. The cloth has a web of six to seven inches and is, thus, rather wider than *sawaye*; but it may well have been narrower at one time. It is woven on a loom which has many characteristics already noted. Like the *turkudi* loom, a rocker (*shuwaka*) rather than a pulley is usually used for the movement of the heddles. The breast beam, presumably because of the wider web, comes (at least in examples seen by us) over the weaver's lap. Were it not

for some of the rather specialized cloth categories produced by weavers using this loom, there might be a good cause for lumping it in with the *zugu* and *sawaye* varieties.

The chief characteristic of *mudukare* cloth is the presence of very thin warp stripes of black, blue or red (Abraham's dictionary only refers to the black striped variety). *Bale*, a type of *mudukare*, has four evenly spaced black warp stripes, each of two warp threads, each stripe an inch apart from the others. We saw one very old man weaving *bale* in local hand spun cotton but the others were using a double stranded machine spun yarn purchased in Garko market. The *bale* of machine spun yarn was of indifferent quality. The pastoral Fulani seemed happy enough with it, however, and their women bought it in large amounts. The weavers in the Wudil region, we were told, preferred the black and white striped *mudukare* to all others. Other areas had other tastes. Near Misau in Bauchi State, for example, we found a group of Hausa Shira weavers, using the same loom as that in the Wudil region, who concentrated on a plain white strip, *farin gari* rather than *mudukare* in the strict sense, but also destined for the Fulani trade by way of dealers in Potiskum, Damagum and Ngelzarma.

The special relationship between these *mudukare* and associated weavers and the Bororo Fulani inescapably reminds one of the similar connection between the *turkudi* weavers and the Tuareg and other Saharan nomads. Like the Tuareg, the Fulani have a long and extremely complex history of nomadism. Over the centuries they have moved over much of the West African fringes of the Sahara and have penetrated deep to the south in many places. Like the Tuareg, the nomadic Fulani do not weave even though all over West Africa we find settled weavers who are related, if only on linguistic grounds, to the pastoral Fulani; yet the pastoral Fulani depend in a multitude of ways on cloth woven by their settled neighbours, be they kinsmen or not.

The young Bororo Fulani men are a striking feature of the northern Nigerian scene, with their elaborate hair styles and arrays of jewelry; and the women too present a dramatic appearance. Personal adornment is obviously a matter to which these people pay great attention, and not least to their dress. The Bororo Fulani men, we have already noted, attach much value to sleeveless smocks made from *turkudi* strips. They also wear less costly garments made from *mudukare*, notably the smocks of the *bundejuma* or *booji* pattern.



148 A Fulani booji shirt decorated with bright woollen embroidery. Kano.

which they may sew up from strips and decorate with embroidery themselves. Indeed, according to Riesman, the tailoring and embroidering of his own garments, but not those of someone else, is about the only kind of domestic work which a Bororo Fulani man will undertake.¹⁷ Riesman argues that this is another facet of the fierce personal independence of these people. By a similar token, the Bororo Fulani man feels an obligation to provide cloth for wife and children, but the sewing of this into garments he leaves to his family. A pastoral Fulani woman, Riesman continues, should only possess cloths provided by her husband. Indeed, the giving and receiving of cloths is symbolic of the very basis of the marriage tie. Yet another pastoral Fulani custom is the requirement for a woman to acquire a special hand woven cloth as a wrapper for her first child. Another observer, Wilson-Haffenden, describes the odd roles assumed by costume in Bororo Fulani jests, games and pranks.¹⁸

Bororo Fulani women like to wear a long wrapper reaching from under the arms almost to the ground. This, traditionally, is of narrow strip of the *zugu* or *sawaye* types, or of *mudukare*, or of a wider strip made

by Keri-Keri weavers such as those near Ningi (see below) or in the Adamawa region of a very narrow strip called *bullam* (which will be discussed in Chapter 4). In every case, where traditional cloth is used, it is of non-Fulani origin, and in Nigeria is usually woven by one or other of the main categories of Hausa or related weavers.

For our present purposes, the major significance of the use of cloth by the Bororo Fulani is the dependence on the output of alien looms. In northern Nigeria the wandering Bororo Fulani and the settled Hausa weavers are thus bound together by an economic nexus of great strength, clothing and body adornment being so important to all societies, and also of considerable antiquity. By observing this relationship today we are in fact seeing the surface of a phenomenon which has its roots deep in Nigerian history. It would be no exaggeration, indeed, to state that the economic history of the southern Sahara cannot be adequately understood without taking careful note of



149 A Fulani girl wearing a typical Hausa striped wrapper. This photograph was taken by C. K. Meek in 1925.



150 A Hausa luru loom near Bichi. Strong ropes tied behind the weaver hold the breast beam. The use of the jangle iron pulley suggests that this weaver was originally a Keri-Keri.

the taste in textiles of the Tuareg, the Bororo Fulani and other wandering peoples, and of the activities of the weavers and merchants who have depended for their livelihood upon that taste over more than a thousand years.

The luru loom

Our fourth category of Hausa weavers and their looms is that which involves the weaving of the relatively thick blankets, *luru*. These blankets vary considerably both in design and in size according to the region in which they have been woven. We identified three major *luru* weaving areas. First: in villages around Katsina. Second: around Kano in villages near Bichi, Kwatarkwashi, Bambata, Kunche and Kuku to the north and west of Kano, and around Makole and Gano on the southern side of Kano. Third, and further afield: we found *luru* weavers in Bauchi State around Gombe and Misau. No doubt other areas exist in northern Nigeria. The Gombe and Misau weavers, mostly of Hausa Shira extraction and some from Auyo, said that they had migrated to the Gombe region after the cotton boom in the 1950s.

151 A Hausa luru weaver working near Misau. Here the *shuwaka* rocker is in use and the weaver has a roof over his head.





151 A Hausa luru weaver working near Misau. Here the *shuwa*, rocker is in use and the weaver has a roof over his head

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The *luru* blanket has as its main purposes protection against night chill and mosquitoes; and its weave is much denser and thicker than that of a cloth intended to be made up into a garment. The typical *luru* may contain between seven and nine strips and be in length about two and a half yards. The width of the individual strip varies from place to place. The Katsina group use warps between ten and twelve inches wide and they sometimes mix wool with cotton, using a cotton warp with a weft inlay design containing both wool and cotton yarns. The group around Kano use, generally, a narrower warp, six to seven inches wide, to produce a particularly dense weave with a mixture of hand spun and machine spun yarns of cotton. The Hausa Shira in the Gombe area use only hand spun cotton, with a warp eight to ten inches wide, to produce a softer blanket, but very durable none the less

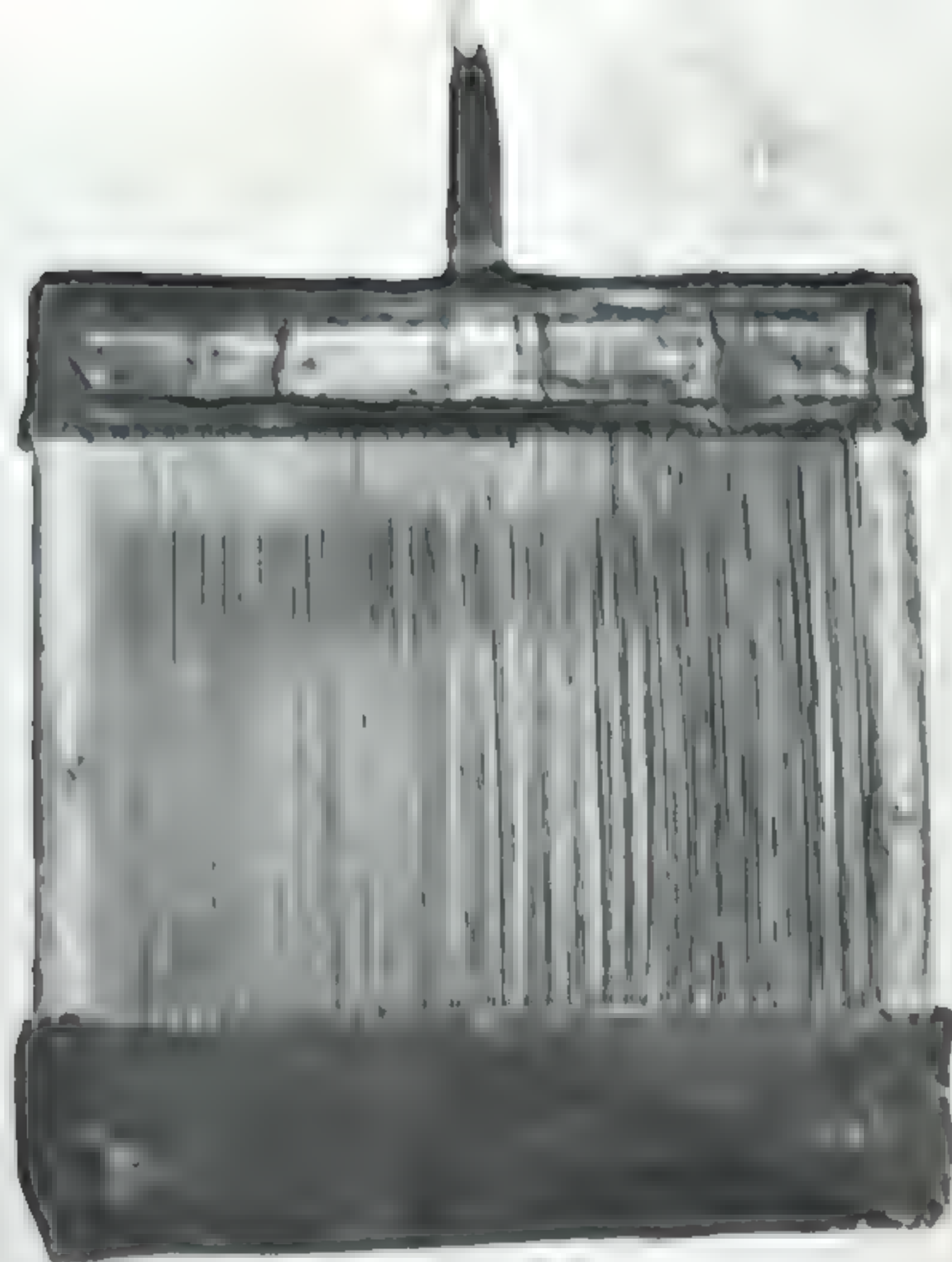
In basic structure the *luru* contains a fairly loose widely spaced warp and a densely packed weft, in contrast to most other Hausa cloths where the warp is denser than the weft. With machine spun cotton a *luru* warp may contain fourteen three-ply threads to the inch, while the weft, if of hand spun cotton, may contain as many as forty threads to the inch of two-ply



152 An old luru weaver still at work near Gombe

weight. Good quality *luru*, when new, should feel heavy and stiff while the poorer qualities tend to feel both light and loose

The *luru* loom has the basic Hausa characteristics of single pole for support of heddles and beater, and of rope attachment for the breast beam. In its traditional form it would seem that a rocker, *shuwa*, should be used; but we encountered a number of *luru* weavers who used a peculiar metal pulley, *chakerikeri*, which will be described in detail in the next section of this chapter, and the use of which probably indicates some intrusive influence. The *luru* beater differs significantly from those in the other Hausa looms so far discussed. Usually about twelve inches wide and roughly square, it has a leather bound bowl far heavier than those so far encountered in this chapter, being packed tight with sand. There is a very close parallel here to beaters used by the Djerma in Niger. Most beaters in the West African narrow strip weaving complex, including all those so far mentioned in this



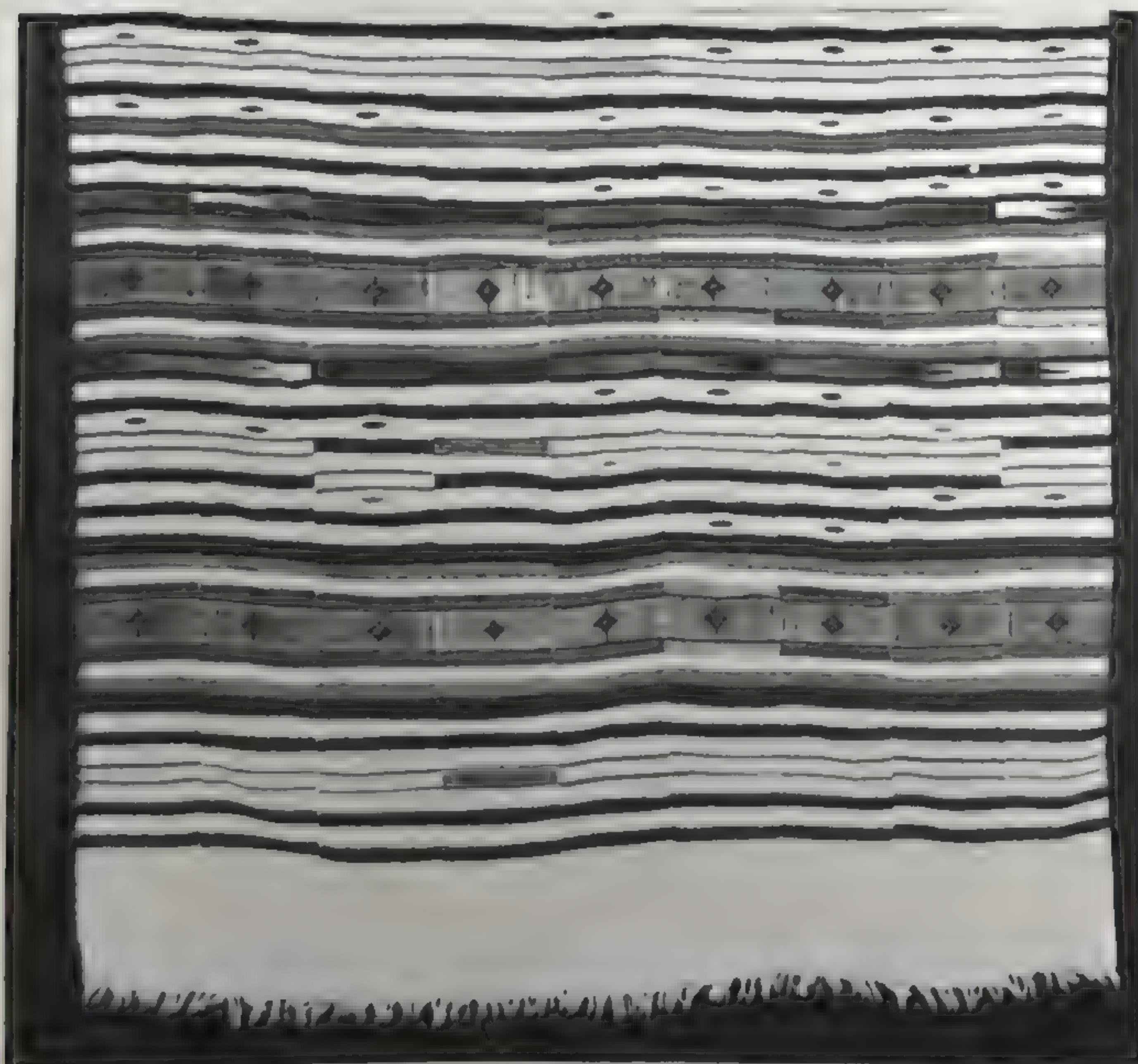
153 Hausa luru beater. The top member measures 10 inches. Bichi book, are suspended by cords attached to both ends of the top member which then converge, like an isosceles triangle, to the point of attachment to roof or loom frame. The typical luru beater, the top of which is also leather bound, is provided with a leather tab emerging from the centre of the top member to which a single

cord attachment is fixed. There is a certain logic in this arrangement in a loom of the Hausa type with a single pole behind the weaver, particularly if the beater be of great width, because a wide beater suspended in the Hausa manner by a pair of cords could well be blocked in its swing by the weaver's head. This method of beater attachment is a feature of the *chakerikeri* loom and we will return to the subject later in this chapter. Beaters of this type are also used, from time to time, in other types of Hausa loom.

Three methods now predominate in the production of luru patterns. First, tapestry weave can be used within the web. Second, there can be reversible bands of inlay weft. Third, the possibilities of weft bands of solid colour can be exploited to yield, when the strips are so matched, the effect of bands running right across the width of the whole cloth.

Tapestry weave, on a technical analysis, involves design where the colour is in fact an intrinsic part of the background weave, and not a supplementary weft addition: hence it does not require a basic tabby to support it. When such a colour block meets another the result is a discontinuous weft, the coloured threads turning back each to become another weft row in its

154



154 Left: Hausa luru showing predominantly weft band decoration. Some tapestry weave can be seen. Kano.



155 Hausa luru, showing use of supplementary weft inlay combined with some tapestry weave designs. 1957, Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.



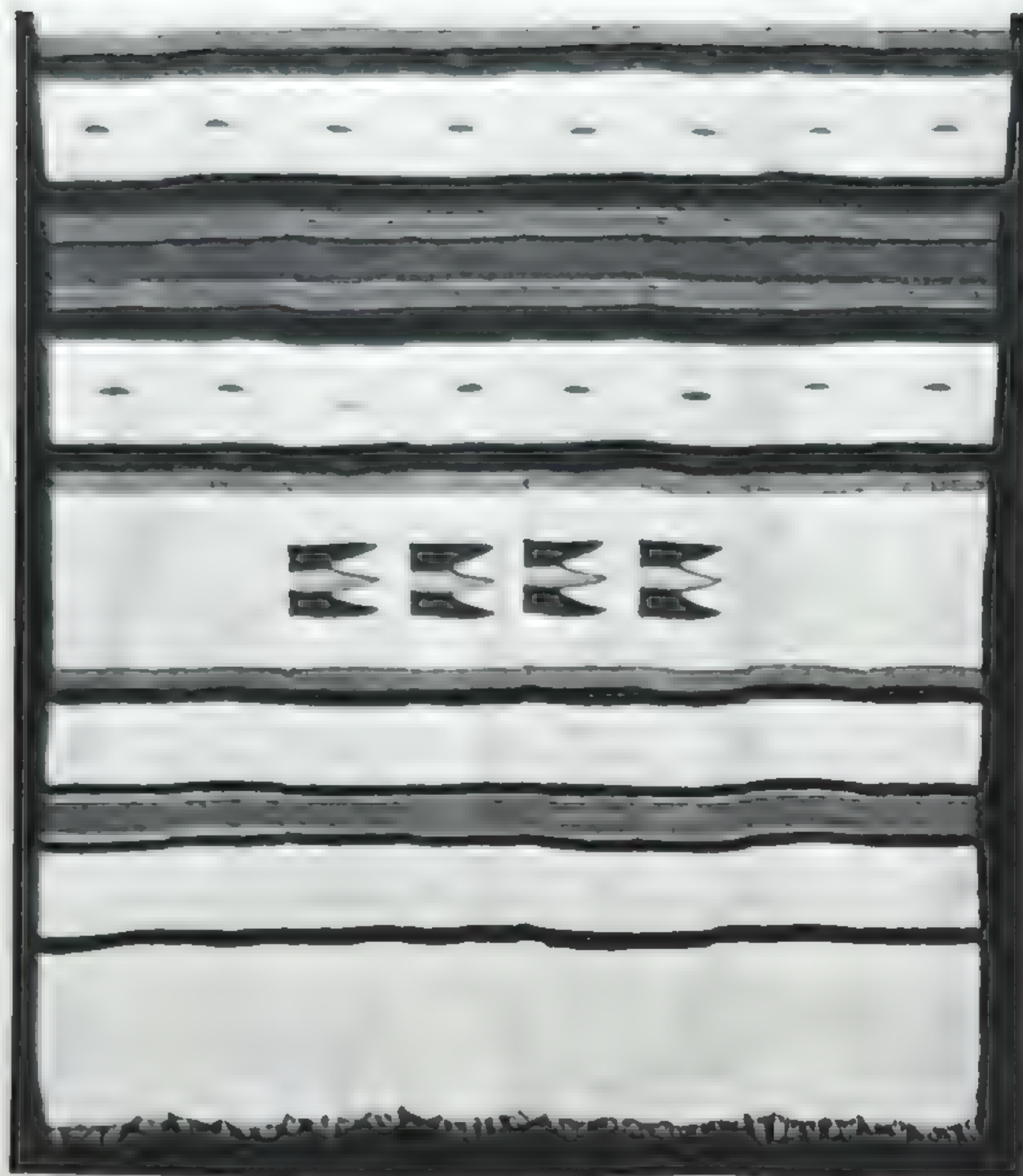
156 Old Hausa *luru* weaver selling his own products in Bichi market. Here the dominant tapestry weave *aska* motif can clearly be seen in this thick cotton blanket known as *luru zubwa*.

own block. There are three methods of linking adjacent colour blocks to each other: by interlinking, by turning back on adjacent warp threads (which can leave slit-like gaps in the cloth), and by sharing a warp thread with an adjacent block for the purpose of turning back. This last method is that most commonly used by the Hausa *luru* weaver. The most common expression of this third tapestry technique in *luru* is the *aska* pattern (a design of 'knife' forms much as appear in the embroidery of *riga*). *Aska* motifs in *luru* point across the weft (in contrast to *riga* where the largest *aska* motifs point down the robe, though, of course, in practice this too is across the weft of the strips making up the garment). In *luru* these motifs generally come in groups of three, six or eight. Another use of tapestry in *luru* is to be found in coloured flecks, often of elongated lozenge shape or the ellipse, located in the centre of the web.

Reversible inlay provides the second method of *luru* decoration. The result can be an intricate pattern,

usually in blue or red, running as a band across the weft. In contrast to the tapestry method, this method involves supplementary weft which may call for the use of an extra heddle threaded up, perhaps, on a count of four or six. In contrast to the inlay designs typical of the Yoruba, these designs can be seen equally well on both sides of the cloth. To the best of our knowledge it is only in *luru* weaving that we find a Hausa use of a supplementary heddle.

The third method of *luru* design is the employment of dominant weft bands. In contrast again with Yoruba patterning, where design tends to run along the direction of the warp, Hausa weft design, both in solid bands and in matched zones of inlay, produces an emphasis of pattern across the width of the cloth much as is the general practice in North African blankets, woven on a broad loom. This method of patterning is very characteristic of blankets made all along the southern edge of the Sahara, in Niger and Mali just as much as in Nigeria; and it may well reflect influences originating from the north of the Sahara, yet another echo of the old caravan contacts across the desert.



157 Typical Hausa luru, with red and green aska motifs, woven in the Dambata region, north of Kano.



158 Older type of luru woven with tapestry motifs in wool, using vegetable dyes, on a cotton ground. Katsina region, 1930, Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.

The design of a *luru* can often tell one something about its place of origin. The *aska* design is a good point. *Luru* with this design in predominantly blue and white appear to be something of a speciality of villages west of Kano like Bichi, Kunche and Kuku, where they are known as *luru zubwa*. *Luru* with *aska* in red and green predominate from villages north of Kano such as those around Dambata.¹⁹ Many *luru* actually take their names from villages of origin; for example *luru Dumbiriki*, *luru Kunche*, *luru Dumblin* and *luru Kuku*.

Many older *luru* which we have examined show the use of both cotton and wool, with a warp of fine hand spun cotton and a wool weft with the colour provided by natural dyes. Later, imported woollen yarns with industrial dye colour were used. In 1978 and 1979 we failed to find any *luru* weavers using wool, but we were told that up to the middle 1960s this material was still being incorporated into *luru*. Both cost and scarcity of woollen yarn, however, has now, it seems, just about brought this practice to an end. In 1972 I acquired from a Hausa trader in Bawku in northern Ghana a *luru* of northern Nigerian origin which contained both wool and cotton: it could well have been one of the last of its kind. Wool blankets are still being made on a considerable scale in Mali, and some of these very distinctive cloths find their way today to major markets like Kano. Many definitely non-Nigerian blankets, in fact, because of this trade pattern have acquired the entirely unjustified name of 'Kano blankets'. It need hardly be said that the true Kano blankets, if such a term must be used at all, are *luru*, and not the woollen or mixed cotton and woollen textiles woven on the Niger bend.²⁰ For all that, the association of wool and *luru* is probably significant. The use of tapestry weave is usually associated, outside Africa as well as within that continent, with wool; and it is almost certain that not so long ago wool would have been one of the characteristic elements, either on its own or combined with cotton, in *luru* blankets.

The *luru* blanket belongs to a wider category of cloths, the blankets called into existence by the needs of dwellers in and along the edges of the Sahara. Inevitably it has affinities with such cloths woven elsewhere both in the Western Sudan and in the Maghreb. One of the closest parallels is with blankets woven in Niger, particularly by the Djerma, who after all can be found over the border only a few miles away from great Nigerian centres like Sokoto and Katsina. We have detected a number of Djerma features in Nigerian *luru*. Moreover, there is evidence that actual

Djerma blankets from Niger do find their way south across the international border. None the less, there is no difficulty in distinguishing a Hausa *luru* from a blanket woven by any other people.

The *luru* industry has its own distribution system. Weavers from the villages bring blankets to certain regular markets where they can sell their produce and buy yarn. There is such a market at Dambata; but perhaps the largest is the market at Bichi, held every Friday. These markets tend to reach their peak activity fairly late in the day, when they become crowded with buyers and sellers. A feature of Bichi market in early 1979 was the sale of enormous quantities of factory spun cotton which had been treated by something like starching to produce a hard stiff fibre. This was brought in in bulk and then rewound into quantities more suited to the needs of individual weavers who would use it for *luru* warps. Also on sale here were odd items of loom equipment such as beaters newly manufactured. To markets like Bichi come the long distance traders (*fatauci*) who purchase *luru* not only for retail in Kano but also as far away as Maiduguri in Borno. *Luru* weavers tend to have special relationships with particular dealers in these markets from whom they may obtain yarn on credit. It was interesting that at Bichi, while we saw *kafi dosa* cloth on sale (for which see the next section of this chapter) there was no *zugu* or *sawaye* there. There were at Bichi, however, a few hanks of hand spun cotton as well as little bundles of spindles with attractively decorated clay whorls: these were brought to market by women. The paucity of hand spun cotton at Bichi was indicative of the decline of hand spinning of cotton, resulting, inevitably, in a decline in the traditional quality of *luru*.

The chakerikeri loom

The last of these five categories of looms, and their users, which we have listed here under the general classification 'Hausa', may not, at least in so far as the users are concerned, strictly speaking be Hausa at all. These are the Keri-Keri (or Kere-Kere or Kare-Kare) whose homeland lies around the meeting point today of Kano, Bauchi and Borno States; and who have lived among Hausas and been influenced by them for a very long time. As weavers they work side by side with Hausas happily enough; though they are also the one northern weaving group to work in large concentrations comparable in numbers to the Yorubas.



159 An unusual Hausa lightweight *luru*, woven in the Sokoto region. This cloth displays patterns suggesting some Djerma influence.



160 Hausa *luru* strips woven with cotton and wool are sewn into hats in the Gombe region.

The *chakerikeri* loom has two distinctive features, though in its essentials of single pole for heddle and beater support and of breast beam attachment ropes it is undoubtedly of the Hausa family. The first feature is the heddle pulley, *chakerikeri*, which term we have used as a name for this particular loom species. The *chakerikeri* pulley is of decorated metal, essentially a bent metal plate, each side more or less gong shaped and the narrow top so folded as to supply an eye for attachment to the support pole. The pulley wheel is made from a nut. There may be two pulley wheels, one mounted above the other, though this arrangement, presumably the analogy of the spare wheel in a motor car, is not common. The most characteristic elements of the *chakerikeri* pulley are: first, the use of incised decoration on the side members; and second, the provision of rings all round the edges of the side members, these rings making a characteristic jingling noise when the pulley is in use. Metal pulleys with this style of decoration are to be found among *luru* weavers where they almost certainly indicate Keri-Keri influence. A similar arrangement of rings around a flat metal surface is found in the handles of some breast beam tightening rods in Nupe, a point already noted above. The *chakerikeri* pulley has been made with considerable care and skill for its specific job in the loom. While the use of metal is far from unknown in looms in Nigeria and elsewhere (we have seen it in the simple Hausa *zigu* heddle pulley, for example, and in all sorts of breast beam tightening rods and stakes for warping up, and in Senegal we even find beaters with metal teeth), yet a loom part of metal with such elaborate decoration, the result of clever blacksmithing, is something which we have only encountered among the Keri-Keri weavers and those whom we presume they have influenced. It may be of significance that the term *kere-kere* in Hausa, according to Abraham, means 'various acts of smithing manufacture'. It is possible that Keri-Keri interest in iron (Meek records the importance of a sacred iron spear among this group) has resulted in the evolution of the peculiar *chakerikeri* pulley, which, indeed, is made by blacksmiths of considerable artistic ability.²¹

The second feature of the *chakerikeri* loom is the beater. In basic form this is not unlike the *luru* beater, with the single central tag of leather for attachment, and with bowl and top leather bound in the normal Hausa manner. The strangeness comes in the width, which may be well over two feet, the widest beater we have encountered so far in our study of the West



161 Hausa *chakerikeri* weaver in the Bight region. Among the *chakerikeri* weavers the use of the iron jangle pulley (162) is universal. It is made by blacksmiths for the weavers and is often embellished with linear designs (163)

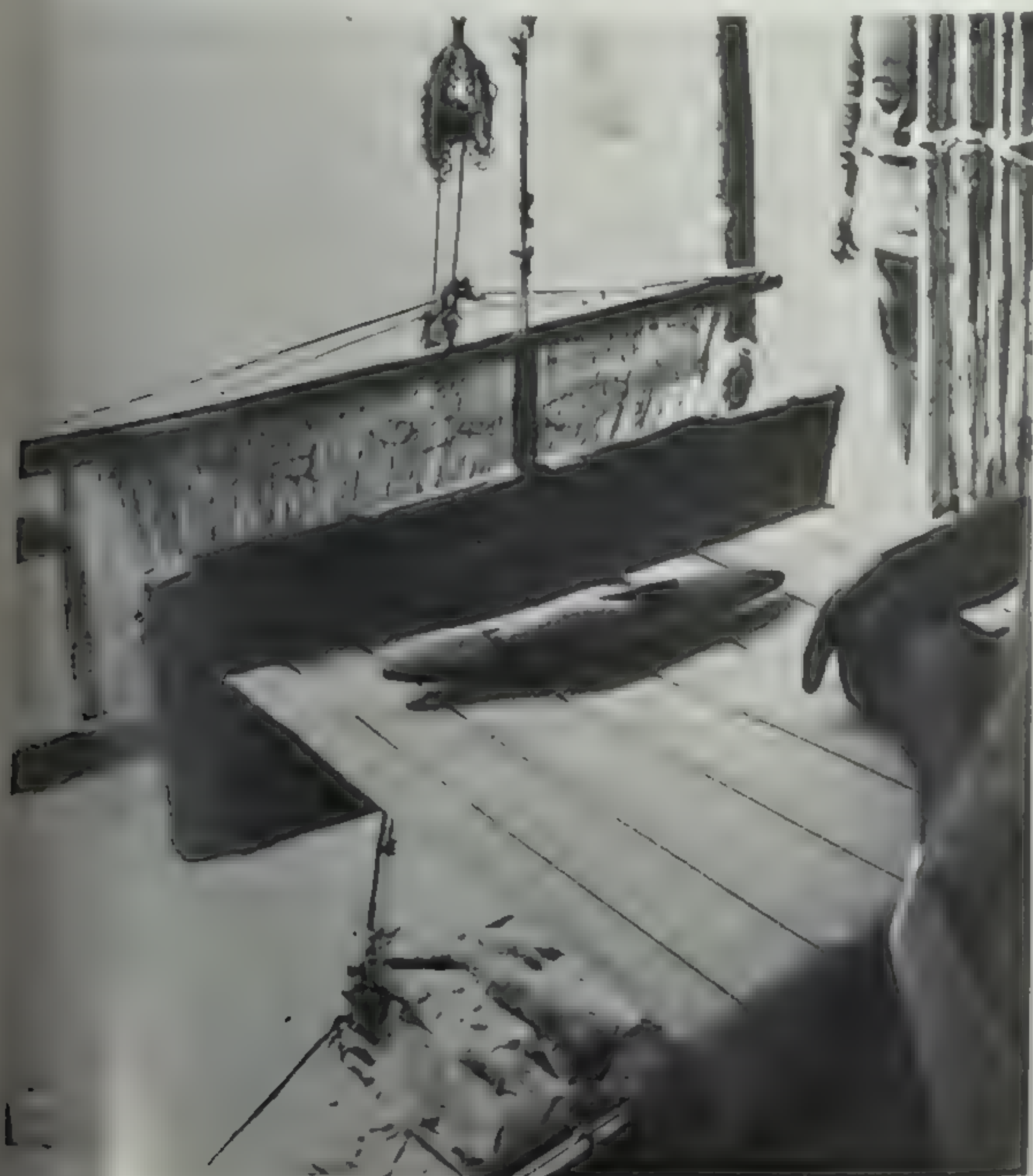


African narrow strip horizontal loom. The width has perhaps confused earlier observers who have talked about pit looms, of the kind found in Ethiopia, in the northeast of Nigeria.

The pit loom is the characteristic male-operated handloom of much of southern and western Asia. The name derives from the practice of the weaver using such an apparatus while sitting on the edge of a pit in which his feet operate the pedals. The pit, in fact, is not essential to the loom; and it is not hard to find examples without pits. Yet, no doubt in part to conserve timber for the uprights supporting breast and warp beams as well as heddle and pulley supports, the pit is a convenient device widely used. Pit looms in Ethiopia show certain Asiatic characteristics, notably the arch-shaped rise in the centre of the top member of the beater; though in other features such as the design of their framework, they may remind one most strongly of some types of West African narrow-strip horizontal loom. A search through the literature will reveal traces of the pit loom of this Ethiopian variety right across from the coast of East Africa in the region of the Horn through the Sudanese provinces of Kordofan and Darfur to Wadai and the shores of Lake Chad.²² Here it meets the West African narrow strip horizontal loom complex.

The temptation to derive the West African loom

164 Wide *chakerikeri* loom in Katsina. The width of the web here is 22 inches. Note use of longer and more pointed shuttle boat.



from this Asiatic weaving apparatus is hard to resist, not least because they are both used to all intents and purposes exclusively by men. Some of the narrower species of Asiatic pit loom, the *pati* loom of the northwest of Pakistan for example, could easily be confused with West African equipment if they were found unlabelled in a museum store by someone with no experience in the world distribution of loom types. Indeed, it would be legitimate in our view to detect some relationship. However, there are so many features in the West African weaving complex and the cloth it produces which are clearly not derived from Asia along this route from the Indian Ocean and Red Sea to Lake Chad that great caution must be applied to speculations about the pit loom. The *chakerikeri* loom is a case in point. While in the width of its beater it clearly resembles a moderately narrow pit loom, yet in so many other features, including the actual method of construction of the beater and its suspension, it belongs entirely to West Africa. The *chakerikeri* loom is essentially a Hausa loom with a very wide beater, not an Asiatic loom adapted to Hausa practice. Typologically it is closer to the *turkudi* loom, with its minuscule warp, than to anything found in India, Pakistan, Western Asia and the Middle East.

While illustrations of *chakerikeri* looms are not rare in the literature—the loom even figures on the cover of Kate Kent's *Introducing West African Cloth*—its distinctive features have not received the comment they deserve. Meek published a photograph of a *chakerikeri* loom which he described as a Kanuri loom, perhaps because he saw it in Kanuri country and did not investigate it too closely: Meek, for all his virtues, was not much interested in cloth and weaving.²³ During our fieldwork in 1979 we at first followed Meek and concluded that this loom was indeed Kanuri, in part because both we and our informants tended to get the terms Keri-Keri and Beri-Beri (a common expression in Hausaland meaning Kanuri) mixed up. Only after some far from easy investigation was it possible to establish that while the Kanuri did weave, they used nothing remotely like the *chakerikeri* loom. Kanuri weaving is discussed in Chapter 4.

In the *chakerikeri* loom the weaver sits on a low seat with the breast beam above his lap. He uses side pedals. The shuttle is much longer than that normally used in Hausa looms, about fifteen inches as opposed to seven and a half. In shape the shuttle resembles a long and narrow canoe such as can be seen on the river Niger, and very similar in form to the shuttle of the



165 Hausa *chakerikeri* weavers from the north working near Ningi.

Toucouleur and other weavers in Senegal; but there can be no direct relationship, the *chakerikeri* shuttle shape being dictated by the extremely wide web it has to cross. The wide web can also involve the introduction of a spreader beam near the drag weight to prevent an unwanted narrowing of the warp as it nears its end. This is a feature in Meek's photograph; but we did not see this beam in use ourselves.

Users of the *chakerikeri* loom are to be found working in groups in the open, in streets in the town, and beneath a convenient shade tree in the countryside. Towards the end of the day, when it is cooler, one can see them beside some of the main roads radiating from Kano, working in suitable patches of open country. These weavers can congregate in quite large groups, perhaps twenty or more, working in two rows facing each other, their looms covered with matting for shade and their warps stretching out into the intervening space rather in the manner of the large weaving 'factories' which we saw in Bamako in Mali in 1972. We encountered in 1979 one such *chakerikeri* 'factory' in a remote village in Ningi Emirate; and without the generous help of the Emir, for which we express our thanks here, we could never have found it.

Chakerikeri weavers can be found over much of Hausaland. We saw them in and around Kaura Namoda, Shinkafi, Talata Mafara, Tsagero, Tanage Tanage, for example, and we even came across one such weaver working alone in the courtyard of an

impressive house in Katsina: he was probably working on a special order from a rich man. At the weekly market at Batsari, a few miles southwest of Katsina there were large quantities of cloth from these looms on sale. *Chakerikeri* weavers were also to be found in the north of Bauchi State and the western part of Borno State. Judging from our Ningi experience in January 1979, for every group of *chakerikeri* weavers that we saw there must have been many more hidden away in the depths of the countryside.

Elsewhere in West Africa, and particularly in those countries which were once under French colonial rule, the presence of a wide beater tends to indicate the work of some *artisanat* where weavers have been encouraged to use a wider web than tradition dictated so as to weave more cloth quicker and cheaper. Prior to our encounter with the *chakerikeri* weavers the widest web on a West African narrow strip horizontal loom which we had seen was in the *artisanat* in Dakar, where the practice was anything but traditional. At first sight we were tempted to apply this line of reasoning to the *chakerikeri*, that wider must mean modern and the product of external influences. This view, however, cannot be entertained seriously. Meek's photograph, dating to the early 1920s, shows this loom in its fully developed form and weaving anything, a cloth wider than that generally produced today, hence the spreader beam, no doubt. An old weaver of about seventy years of age, with whom we

talked in Talata Mafara, explained that he had learned his craft in youth from an equally old weaver, from Katsina, which could well put one back into the nineteenth century. This weaver confirmed that in his lifetime there had been no major change in such matters as the width of web and the form of particular loom parts. The conclusion is hard to resist, that both the *chakerikeri* loom and its wide cloth are old. If so, then there is no real reason why they should not be of comparable antiquity to the *turkudi* and its minuscule web of less than one inch. We are left, in fact, no nearer to the solution of the question as to which came first, wide or narrow. The fact that today much of the output of this loom competes directly with the wide cloth woven on the woman's vertical loom does not really carry us much further.²⁴ One could argue that this competition produced a wider web. One could argue equally well that the existence of a wide web made this competition possible.

Many *chakerikeri* weavers will say, when asked, that they are Hausa; but further questioning will often result in the admission to a Keri-Keri origin. The fact is that many Keri-Keri weavers have been in Hausaland for several generations. Our impression is that their craft originated among the Keri-Keri, and their kinsmen the Ngizim and Fika Bolewa, somewhere in the general region of what is today the junction of the borders of Kano, Bauchi and Borno States. The cloth from this loom is very common in markets in a rough circle centred on Potiskum and extending east along the Maiduguri road to Ngelzarma and Damaturu and southwest to Ningi.

The users of the *chakerikeri* loom today are rather adventurous in that they are prepared to experiment with design and to convert established designs to the circumstances of their wide web. This width, moreover, makes it easy for the *chakerikeri* loom to be used to adapt from the repertoire of the woman's upright loom as well as that of the male horizontal loom. Names from the prototype cloths can easily be carried over to the *chakerikeri* versions to add some confusion to the system of nomenclature of these textiles; but in essence most of them can be classified into one or other of three main categories.

First, there is a variety in which the predominant background colour is usually deep indigo blue. It may have a wide range of warp stripe designs as well as both plain weft bands and quite elaborate inlays. In the Fika and Katsina regions these cloths carry names such as *kafi dosa*, *bunu*, *ummaru* and *gwado amaji*, the

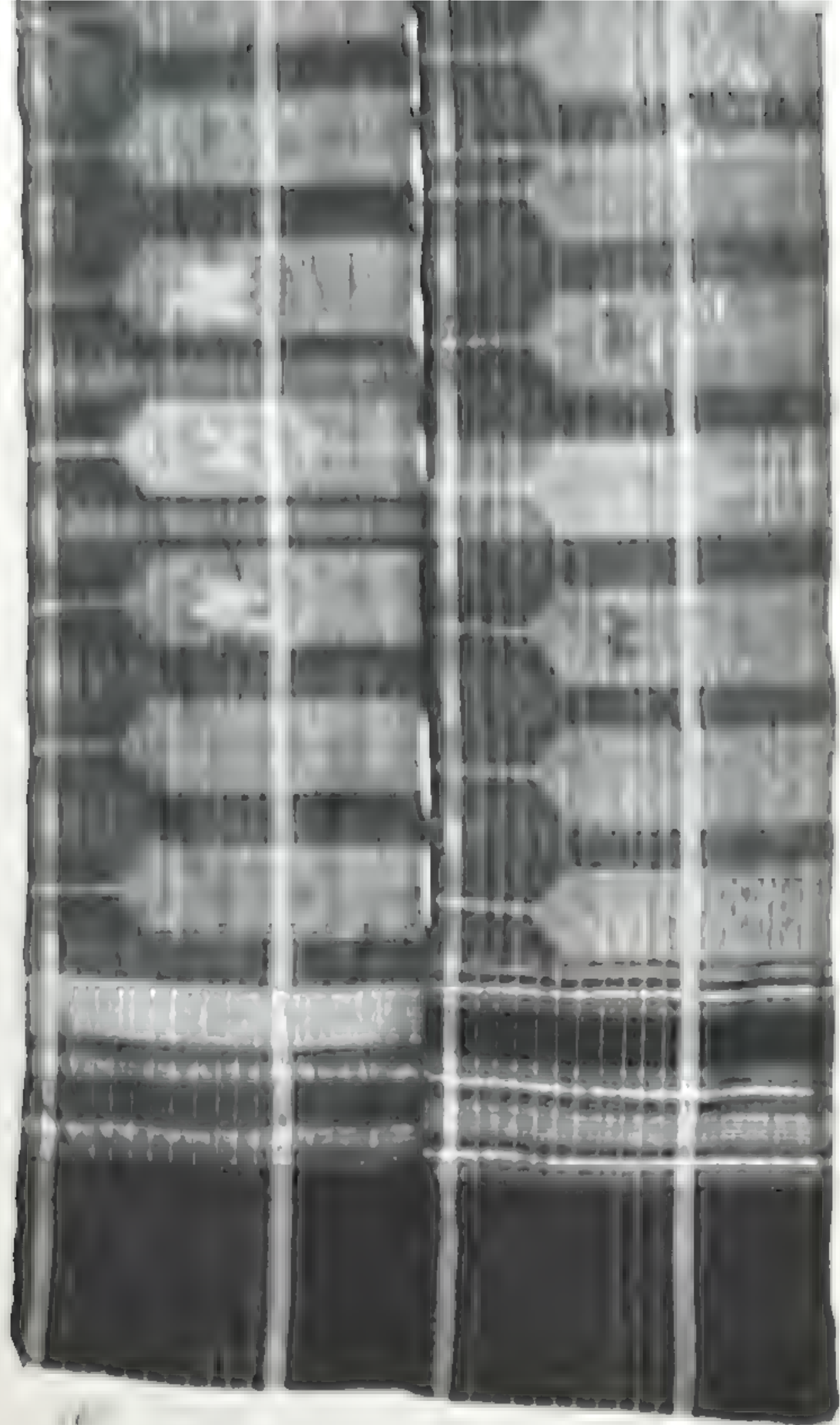


166 A Keri-Keri weaver working on his wide loom in his true home in Damagum, near Potiskum.

names denoting qualities as well as designs. Similar cloths in the Bauchi region are *kimba* and *farago*. One pattern of this genre which we found being made on a large scale near Ningi in early 1979 was known by the English word 'psychodelic', an apt description of a dramatically widened inlay design very popular in markets in this area and as far afield as western Borno State. If one has to give a single name for this genre, *kafi dosa* will probably do as well as any other. It was a term we found understood in most markets where this kind of cloth was on sale.

Second, there is a type with a white background and a wide range of warp stripe designs, often in blue but by no means to the exclusion of other colours. This is generally referred to simply as *gwado*, a Hausa word which really means little more than just 'cloth'. *Gwado*, in the *chakerikeri* sense, embraces some quite unexpected designs including blue and white checks which would not look out of place as table cloths in a European café.

Finally, there is a group of cloth designs intended for the pastoral Fulani market and inevitably replicating the repertoire of *mudukare* cloths. For lack of a better term we will call these pseudo-*mudukare*. A characteristic cloth of this genre is one of more or less mauve background with thin blue, red and black warp stripes, regularly repeated rows of central inlay blocks executed with imported knitting yarn of pink, green and the like, and flanked by what can only be



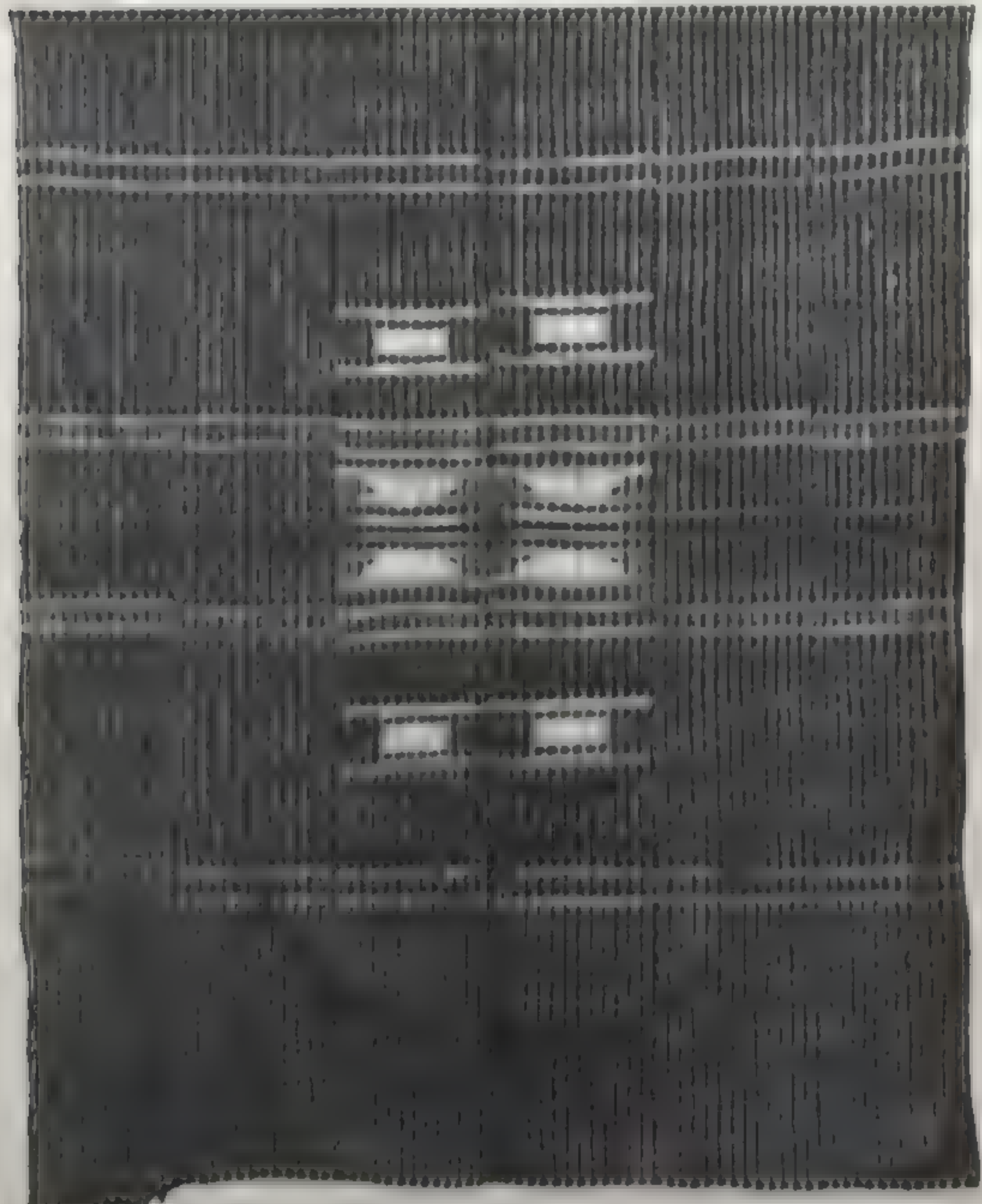
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Woven cloth from the checkerboard looms, 167 Tarago cloth called *Parago*. 168 Tarago cloth called *Parago*. 169 Tarago cloth called *Parago*. 170 Tarago cloth called *Parago*. 171 Woven cloth from the Kano region known as *Kano* cloth.



169

170 Keri Keri woven in Damagum



171

171



described as inlaid tufts of silky yarn and red and gold lurex of the *siliki* variety. While it would be difficult to call this design attractive, it seems to sell well with the pastoral Fulani, and it turns up in quantity in most markets where cloth from the *chakerikeri* loom is sold.

Within all three main categories one can find a considerable variety of width, from perhaps as narrow as eight inches to wider than two feet. A detailed classification of all the types of cloth produced by these weavers would be very difficult and, probably, pointless, since one can say that almost any type of cloth in great demand in northern Nigerian markets, either from the man's horizontal loom or the woman's upright loom, will have some kind of parallel in the repertoire of the *chakerikeri* weavers. This fact, no doubt, goes far to explain why these weavers have hitherto received so little notice in the literature: their products have just not been recognized for what they are. The main use for these cloths is in women's wear, though some of the *gwado* variety could be used in blankets of lighter weight than the traditional *luru*. Like the cloths woven by women on the upright loom, cloths from the *chakerikeri* looms, by virtue of their width, can be made up into wrappers or blankets consisting of but two panels with a consequent economy in the labour of sewing when compared to cloths made from narrower strips.

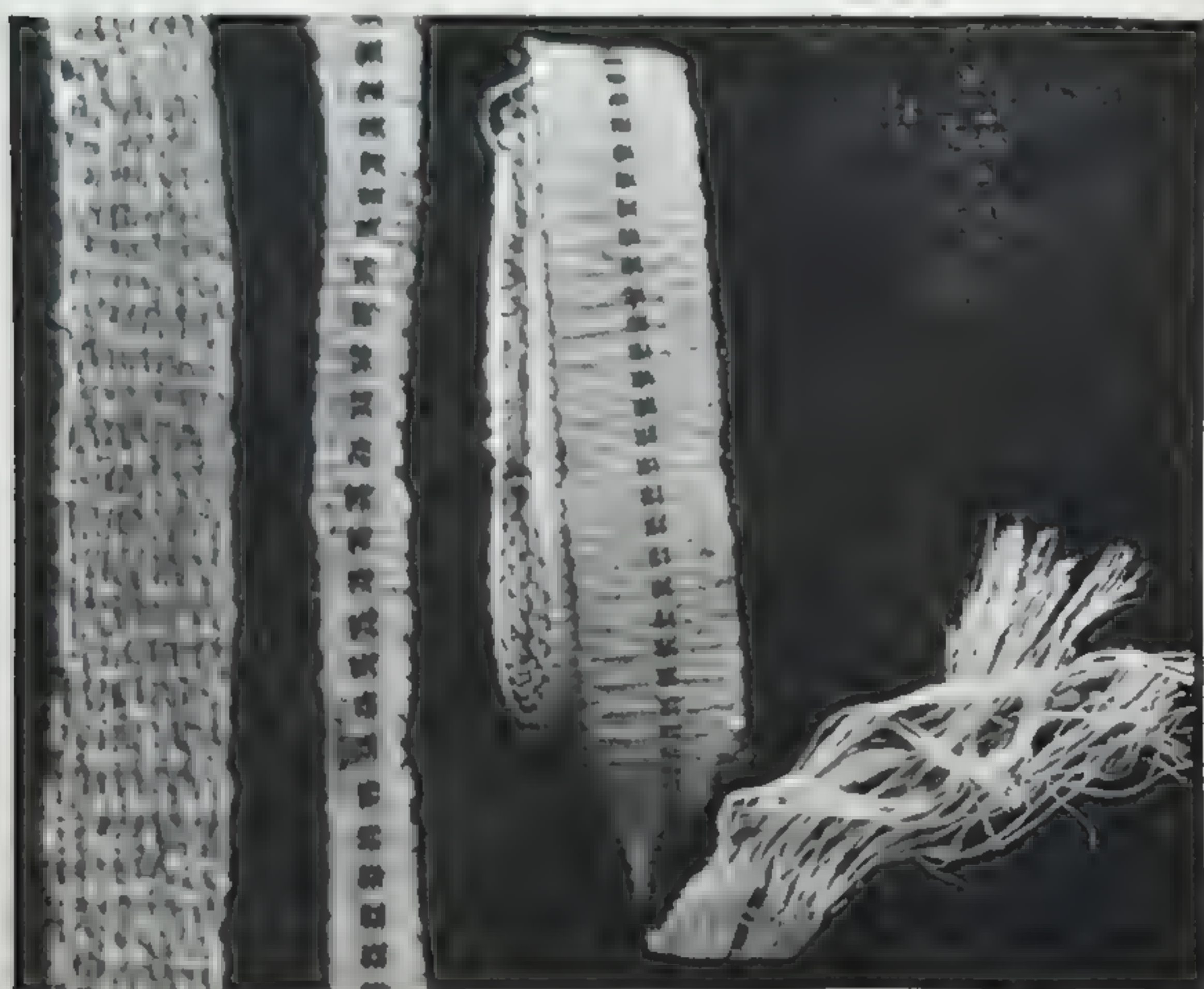
Many of the *chakerikeri* weavers whom we encountered were young men. This appeared to be one area in the handloom weaving industry of northern Nigeria where expansion rather than contraction was the rule. Having to a great extent escaped from the confining canons of tradition, the *chakerikeri* weavers could adapt, adopt or devise patterns to suit any demand which their commercial expertise might detect. Equally at home in hand spun and factory made cotton yarn, these weavers undoubtedly have the potential to adapt themselves to economic and cultural change. They were the one Nigerian weaving group whom we encountered who had the capability to compete with both local and imported factory made broadloom cloth.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that the general description of this group as *chakerikeri* weavers is our own. The weavers of this group whom we questioned could not think up a name which distinguished them from other weavers. In their own eyes they were just weavers, *masaka*, (singular, *masaka*) who used their own traditional equipment.



Hausa hand spun *chakerikeri* wide cloth, here used for sewing into functional gambari smock (172) and trousers (173). Kankara region.

They all agreed, however, that their pulley was called *chakerikeri*; and, along with the wide beater, this was a distinguishing feature of their loom. *Chakerikeri*, of course, must be a variant of the Hausa term for pulley elsewhere, such as *chakeri* and *nakerere*. An alternative device would be to use the group name Keri-Keri. The objection here is that while nearly all the weavers of this class with whom we spoke admitted to a Keri-Keri origin, the vigour and expansiveness of this particular branch of weaving in Hausaland makes it highly probable that men who are not Keri-Keri have taken up the craft. On balance, therefore, *chakerikeri* seemed to answer best our descriptive purpose.



174 Hausa warp-faced straps known as *masaki wundu*, sold in almost every northern Nigerian market.

Drawstrings and bands

Throughout Hausaland one can find on sale in markets long warp faced strips, usually of very narrow width (one inch or so) and intended for trouser drawstrings and the like, of white cotton usually with a brownish stripe running down the centre. In markets which serve the owners of donkeys and horses there are also various straps of similar texture. The drawstrings, *masaki wundu*, and many of the girth straps, *majaye*, are made by a method which, while it falls outside the context of the narrow strip horizontal loom, yet is executed by men, generally in machine spun cotton today, though formerly hand spun cotton was used. These drawstrings, moreover, turn up in markets far removed from Hausaland: we found some, made of hand spun cotton, in Orba market, near Nsukka, for example, sold in neat rolls just like *zugu* strip.

The loom used for this purpose is illustrated by Menzel in her descriptive catalogue of West African textiles in the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin.²⁵ The apparatus consists of two upright poles of bamboo or cane, set in the ground some three to four feet apart, and connected at the top by a horizontal rod which ties together the two uprights and also supports a very simple single heddle. One shed is made with this heddle, the other by the manual depression of the appropriate threads, the shed being kept open by means of a stick. The shuttle is simply a short stick or bobbin, wound with yarn. The technique produces a warp faced slack web, the warp being much looser than the weft and tending to obscure it. The overall effect is very much like braiding even if the technique is different.

There are parallels for this type of work both in Africa and in Asia. We have seen bands of this type in Morocco. Women in northwestern Pakistan make drawstrings in almost this way, though their apparatus is vertical rather than horizontal. We may even detect echoes of the Maghreb tablet loom, of which there is a good example from Tunisia in the Hamburgisches Museum für Völkerkunde und Vorgeschichte. Whatever its origins, this simple loom and its output are both very much part of rural life in Hausaland, and no account of male weaving in northern Nigeria should omit some reference to them.²⁷

Zaria

Zaria was the one city in northern Nigeria where we were able to observe weaving on the narrow horizontal loom being carried on as a highly organized urban craft along the lines we have already discussed in connection with such Yoruba weaving centres as Ilorin and Iseyin. If other such urban weaving exists in Hausaland it almost certainly follows the Zaria pattern, though Zaria is by no means typical of Hausa cities. The Zazzau Hausa clans to whom it is a centre certainly regard themselves as a distinct group within the Hausa world. In Zaria, moreover, which is near the southern point of the triangle which we have defined as the Hausa heartland, there are definitely southern influences, immediately from such groups as the Gbani and, more remotely, from Nupe. Finally, though this may be a factor of technical irrelevance but all the same of practical significance, we found weavers, and others for that matter,²⁸ in the most attractive city of Zaria particularly helpful in providing us with information.

and giving us a practical demonstration of their craft.

One master weaver of Zaria, Mohammed Moussa, and his family were especially helpful; and we have used this source as the basis for our description of Zaria weaving. Mohammed Moussa's family have been weaving in Zaria for generations. Their experience extends back to at least the first half of the nineteenth

century. The craft is run by the head of the household, the *maigida*, usually a father or grandfather, but in the case of Mohammed Moussa a senior brother, his father being too old to manage affairs. Mohammed Moussa now works with just four younger brothers, all weavers, who between them have no less than fourteen sons. All old enough to do so work together under the *gandu* system, that is to say under the control of the *maigida* until at least they are old enough to marry.²⁹ Those who, by age and marital status have emerged from this system still may, if they so choose, continue to live in the family compound and cooperate in the family business as what, in European terminology, might be described as independent partners.

The system also embraces the women in the household, who do the work of spinning, carding and dyeing, though living in seclusion. Male children from about the age of eight begin to learn the craft, which is regarded as a major call on their time at least as important as more formal schooling. They are, in fact, apprentices. Should there not be sufficient boys within the family, outside apprentices can be taken in on payment of a fee to the head of the household. If demand so requires, outside qualified weavers can be employed on a casual basis. So, too, may be recruited people to warp up, wind spools, fetch yarn and such tasks.

There are quite a number of family enterprises of this kind in Zaria; but we could not provide a



175 Hausa weaving shed built against the inside of the compound wall, and not visible from the street, Zaria.



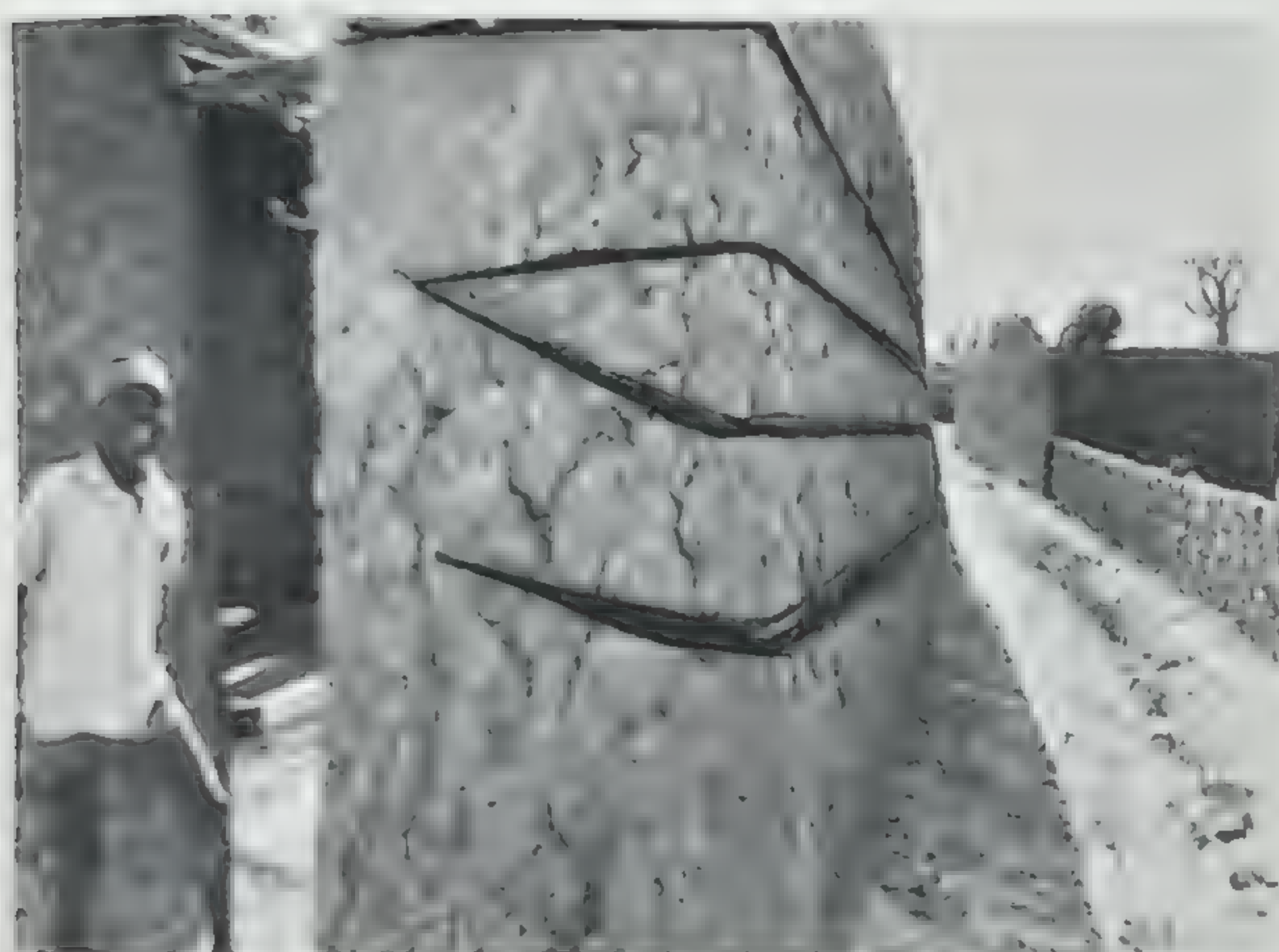
176 Warp threads being prepared along the house walls, and leading into the weaving shed, Zaria.

meaningful statistical estimate. Their usual place of work is either in the courtyard immediately behind the entrance house to the compound, the *zaure*, or in the *zaure* itself. Mohammed Moussa and his family weave in a special structure in the first compound, between the main outer wall and the inner, women's, compound where, in fact, quite active women's weaving on the vertical loom takes place.

Were it not for the process of warping up, one could well walk through the streets of old Zaria without detecting the presence of weavers. However, the system of warping up along walls, a version of the Hausa preference for vertical surfaces upon which to

lay out the warp, indicates in a manner which one cannot fail to observe that weaving is going on behind many a dark doorway. Some Hausa weavers warp up in the standard West African manner on the ground, sometimes using a yarn carrier shaped rather like a cross with very short arms, a stick located in a hole through a cane, the yarn being wound round the arms of the cross and its top.³⁰ In Zaria the standard equipment is a multiple bobbin carrier to all intents and purposes the same as that used by the Yoruba. The skein winder, on which the yarn is placed prior to being wound on to bobbins, is also of the inverted conical basket form like that of the Yoruba. Those engaged in warping up, walk up and down the street along the main wall of the weaver's house, stretching their yarn on iron pegs set in to the wall, and often running the warp round corners in a way which adds a fascinating horizontal dimension to the brown mud brick lines of sub-Saharan architecture. The cross, that crucial point where the warp threads turn back on themselves, is made at a key point, a peg usually located near the top of the door into the *zaure*.

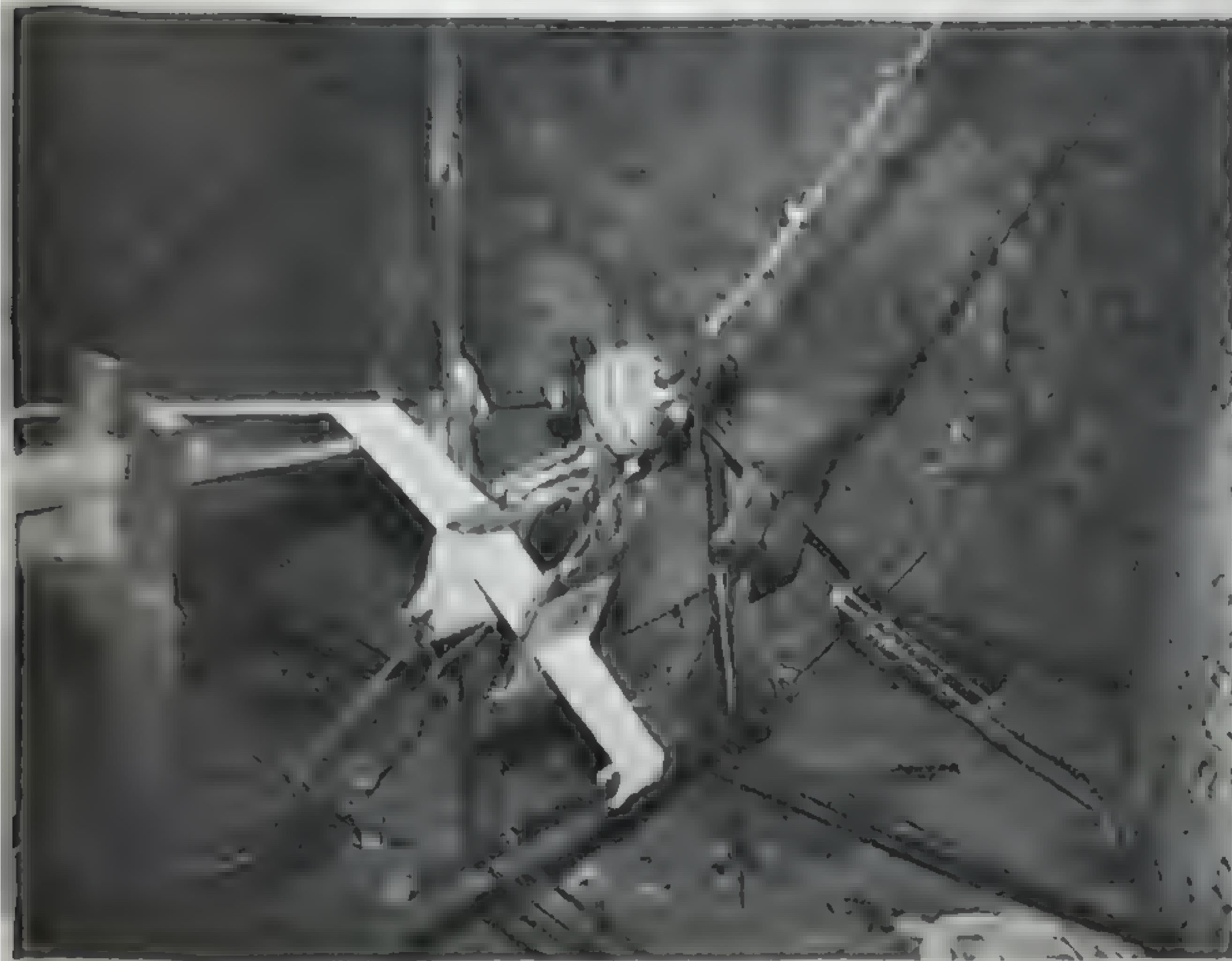
The looms in Mohammed Moussa's house were typical of other looms which we saw in Zaria. Situated within the structure of a house, their heddles and pulleys were attached to the back wall; and the characteristic open air single pole was absent. An odd feature of all the Zaria looms which we saw, those in



177 and 178 Other examples of wall warping-up in Zaria. Here the 'cross' portion of the warp can just be seen in the picture above.



178



179 Inside the Hausa weaving shed of the Mohammed Moussa family in Zaria. Five looms are worked here. Note the use of bones in the floor to secure the breast beams and iron tension bars.

Mohammed Moussa's compound and in other compounds, was the use of animal bones as pegs to secure the breast beam tie ropes, the pedal tie ropes and, in addition, to provide a further fulcrum under the pedals. This feature, though we saw traces of it elsewhere, was a particular characteristic of Zaria. The Zaria pulley was of the plain metal framed type with a nut wheel, and called *chakeri*. The beater was of the standard Hausa type, with double cord attachment and leather cover for both bowl and top. Some of the beaters made in Mohammed Moussa's compound had bowls of beautiful dark red leather when new, which were further embellished with writing in Arabic script, a feature which we saw nowhere else in Nigeria. With age, the leather darkened and the script was worn away.

The warp width used by Mohammed Moussa and other Zaria weavers was in the order of four inches. Some plain cloth of hand spun cotton was being made; but the main emphasis in early 1979 was on a mixture of machine spun cotton and glittering yarn of the *siliki* variety, known simply as *sakake* and destined for use in women's wrappers. More traditional cloth could be woven on special order for use in the making of a *riga*. One member of Mohammed Moussa's family was working on an imitation *sanyan*. Another was producing red warp striped strip, called *barige*, which was used for *riga* linings, the Zaria equivalent of the Nupe *ce*. The compound could also produce the classic

saki (guineafowl) design. The over all impression of this Zaria repertoire was that it related more closely to Nupe and Ilorin than it did to the general range of Hausa weaving which we encountered elsewhere in northern Nigeria.

In marketing, Mohammed Moussa and his family tended to deal either with individuals, who placed specific orders, or with certain dealers with whom there existed a long relationship. There was little weaving 'on spec' such as we encountered in the Yoruba *aso oke* industry. Moreover, despite the presence of a significant number of weaving compounds in Zaria, we could find no evidence of a weaving guild structure of the kind present in Yoruba centres like Ilorin and Iseyin.

One other element of the Zaria textile industry deserves notice here. Zaria is an important centre for the embroidery of robes. The main emphasis, however, was on the embroidery of imported or local factory made broadcloth (which is outside the scope of this book) rather than on narrow strip cloth. The organization of embroiderers was much the same as in Bida, with a correlation between this craft and Koranic schools. Our quest for good quality embroidered narrow strip garments led us in two directions which, in the end, both pointed to Bida. First, we came across a number of dealers in high quality and expensive *riga*, the best of which all seemed to have come from Bida. Second, research in the market revealed a number of excellent old *riga*, including ones in *sanyan* or *tsamiya* which, again, were of Bida origin. Our research in Zaria, indeed, confirmed our impression that Nupe remained the major centre in Nigeria for really good (and expensive) embroidered robes in narrow strip cloth.

This is not to say that there is no embroidery in Zaria, or, for that matter, elsewhere in Hausaland. There is, as the researches of D. H. Heathcote have shown beyond doubt, a great deal. The range of this decorative art form is well indicated in Heathcote's catalogue for the Arts of the Hausa exhibition held in London as part of the World Festival of Islam in 1976. Here we see quite elaborately embroidered women's wrappers from not only Zaria but also Sokoto. Heathcote admits, however, that the use of embroidered decoration on Hausa women's clothing is a practice of fairly recent date; and that the designs have been derived either from those traditional to male garments or from forms borrowed from outside Hausaland, from the Near East for example.³¹



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Notes

¹ See, for example, C. K. Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria*, 2 vols, London 1925, Vol. II, p. 87, contains some interesting remarks on the suggestion that the very name 'Hausa' is connected with the wearing of clothes.

² P. J. Shea, *The Development of an Export Oriented Dyed Cloth Industry in Kano Emirate in the Nineteenth Century*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin 1975, Ann Arbor & London 1979, p. 131.

³ L. C. Briggs, *Tribes of the Sahara*, Oxford 1960, pp. 147, 184, 207, 229.

⁴ H. Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, London 1857-8, Vol. III, pp. 125-7.

⁵ Shea, op. cit., p. 186 and Ch. VI generally.

⁶ Briggs, op. cit., p. 125.

⁷ I. Madauci, *Hausa Customs*, Zaria 1968, p. 38.

⁸ Shea, op. cit., p. 79.

⁹ On the significance of the veil to the Tuareg, see for example: J. Keenan, *The Tuareg*, London 1977, Ch. 8.

¹⁰ Various personal communications, mainly in Niger in 1977-8, and examination of garments.

¹¹ Briggs, op. cit., p. 154.

¹² H. A. R. Gibb, ed., *Ibn Battuta, Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, London, 1929, p. 333.

¹³ For an illustration of an interesting form of raised seat, in this case a kind of earthen mound, see: B. Menzel, *Textilien aus Westafrika*, 3 vols, Berlin 1972, Vol. I, Pl. 214.

¹⁴ Shea, op. cit., p. 95; I. Madauci, op. cit., p. 66, described *kudi* cloth as being a red-coloured cloth with black borders.

¹⁵ Madauci, op. cit., pp. 7, 15.

¹⁶ Madauci, op. cit., p. 66, states that this cloth is no longer woven in Hausaland. In fact, though perhaps rare, I did find examples in both Sokoto and Bungudu.

¹⁷ P. Riesman, *Freedom in Fulani Social Life*, Chicago 1977, pp. 20-3.

¹⁸ J. R. Wilson-Haffenden, *The Red Men of Nigeria*, London 1930, p. 118.

¹⁹ Barth, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 137, mentions that much red and green wool cloth was imported into Kano. Perhaps this was unravelled to provide suitable coloured yarn for *luru* weavers at a time when these blankets still contained a good proportion of wool in their make-up.

²⁰ See for some discussion of woollen blankets outside Nigeria: V. Lamb, *West African Weaving*, London 1975, p. 58; P. J. Imperato, 'Wool blankets

of the Peul of Mali', *African Arts* VI, No. 3, 1973; P. J. Imperato, 'Kereka Blankets of the Peul', *African Arts* IX, No. 4, 1976.

²¹ C. K. Meek, *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*, 2 vols., London 1931, Vol. II, p. 232.

²² See, for example: J. Adamson, *The People of Kenya*, London 1967, p. 359, for such a loom at Moyale near Lake Rudolph; A. Chevalier, *L'Afrique Central Française—Mission Chari-Tchad 1902-1904*, Paris 1908, for the Dar Rongas region of the Central African Empire; G. Nachtigal, trans. and ed. A. G. B. Fisher & H. J. Fisher, *Sahara and Sudan*, Vol. IV, *Wadai and Darfur*, London 1971, p. 365, for this kind of cloth, called *toqqiya*, across from Kordofan through Darfur to Wadai.

Dr. Robert Brill photographed a pit loom in Gondar, Ethiopia, in 1973. We must express our appreciation for his thoughtfulness in bringing his pictures to our attention.

²³ C. K. Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria*, London 1925, Vol. II, fig. 60.

²⁴ There are grounds for supposing that woman's weaving reached northern Nigeria fairly recently. See, for example: P. Hill, *Rural Hausa*, Cambridge 1972, p. 333. Note, also, the failure of Baba of Karo to mention weaving. See: M. Smith, *Baba of Karo: a woman of the Muslim Hausa*, London 1954.

²⁵ B. Menzel, *Textilien aus Westafrika*, Berlin 1972, Vol. I, Pls. 170-82.

²⁶ I am much indebted to Dr W. Seidensticker for sending me pictures and information on this Tunisian tablet loom.

²⁷ Meek refers to yet another form of textile work in Hausaland, the making a kind of braid used for hanging pendants and charms, using *alharini* and known as *sankan siliya*. It is not clear from his account whether this is male or female work. See: Meek, *Northern Tribes*, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 110.

²⁸ In particular, we would like to thank Alhaji M. M. Kyari of the Nigerian Tobacco Company for his help while we were in Zaria.

²⁹ See, for example: Hill, op. cit., Ch. III, for a detailed discussion of the *gandu* system.

³⁰ See: Menzel, op. cit., Vol. I, Pls. 370a and 370b for illustrations of this piece of equipment which, according to Menzel, is called *karen gera*.

³¹ See: D. H. Heathcote, *The Arts of the Hausa*, London 1976. Of particular interest are fig. 87, a woman's wrapper from Sokoto with a central panel of embroidery on a cloth essentially of *zugu* strip, and Pl. 4, which shows a woman wearing a blue wrapper of similar strip covered over with embroidery of the kind which we would normally associate with male trousers. The exhibition for which this work was the catalogue, held at the Commonwealth Institute in London as part of the 1976 World of Islam Festival, contained a pair of wide trousers embroidered in Kano (fig. 91) which seemed to us to be rather less elaborate than garments which we have associated with Bida.

180 Cloth merchant in the old Kasura Kurume market in Kano. A wide assortment of Hausa man's weave cloths are on sale. *Togoni* blankets, *sakake* wrappers, *gwanda* cloths, *mudakare* cloth, *luru* boots, *booji* smocks, *saki* cloth, among others, can be identified.

181 Overleaf: example of the best quality *bullam*, woven in Zaria, near Yola. These very narrow strip white gowns are much prized by men of Adamawa.



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Borno and Adamawa



The area covered in this chapter includes Borno State, much of Gongola State and some of the eastern part of Bauchi State. If we ignore for the moment the Hausa weavers who have made their way to many a remote corner of this region, the dominant loom type here is one which we have termed Chadic. Users of the Chadic loom include the Kanuri, the Kotoko and Bagirmi group (now in the main in Cameroun), the Marghai, Fali, Bata, Kilba and Nzangi (Njai) many of whom have intermixed with local Fulbe, and the Waja group.

We have, for geographical reasons, included in this chapter the Mumuye weavers who occupy a small area along the border between Cameroun and Gongola State. The Mumuye are not, strictly speaking, members of the West African horizontal loom narrow strip weaving complex at all: they use a ground loom of a type well represented in various forms in Cameroun. Weaving among the Mumuye, however, is

182 *A Waja weaver sewing up his white strips of farin waja. Tallase.*

the task of men; and no account of Nigerian weaving would be complete without some discussion of their fascinating, but little known, craft. The Mumuye weavers can be found to the southwest of Yola in the countryside around Zinna (or Zing).

The Kanuri weavers today are to be found in a stretch of Borno State which can be defined roughly as that lying between Maiduguri and the Cameroun border and extending from Marte in the north, through Dikwa, Konduga, Dumboa and Biu and as far south as Mubi on the Borno-Gongola border. This territory is in fact a strip along the Nigeria-Cameroun border. The international limits do not mark the limits of the Chadic loom, which is known in Cameroun among the Kotoko around Logone Birni (on the Cameroun-Chad border) and in Chad among Bagirmi

weavers around Tchekna (Massenya). Most of the other groups listed above are found on both sides of international borders in this corner of Africa where the history of boundary alignments has been particularly complex as a consequence of the nineteenth century European colonial attempts to partition the continent. Hence for the Marghai, Fali, Bata, Kilba, Nzangi and for various Fulbe in northeastern Gongola from Yola through Zummo to Mubi there are counterparts in Cameroun. It is to be regretted that the literature on weaving past and present on the Cameroun side of the border is far from extensive; and even less has been written about weavers further east in Chad. It seems probable that this general zone of northeastern Nigeria, northern Cameroun and southeastern Chad marks the northeastern limit of the West African narrow strip horizontal loom complex; but on the information at present available it would be hard to define limits with greater precision than this. Certainly that part of Cameroun between Maroua and Garoua and that salient of Chad enclosing Leré contains many weavers who echo the situation on the Nigerian side of the border.

The Waja group of weavers are to be found in a small pocket in the southeastern corner of Bauchi State between Gombe and the Benue valley. Their most important centres include Tallase, Galengu and Bangu. They live in a part of Nigeria that was, until recently, very remote indeed. Today, however, the vast agricultural project based on Gombe is beginning to open up their country in a dramatic manner.

With the exception of the Mumuye, who do not use a horizontal loom at all, and the migrant Hausa, who tend to conserve their traditional loom types, the other groups which we have listed use a loom of a type which we have called Chadic. It has three main features which distinguish it from the neighbouring Hausa loom. First, instead of the single pole, the Chadic loom employs a frame which includes two longitudinal top members across which are hung on a cross-bar the beater and heddles. The cross-bar is not tied to the frame but is free to move along the longitudinal members very much in the manner of framed looms in other parts of West Africa: those of the Asante and Ewe in Ghana are examples of the same basic structure. Second, this loom employs a beater with a heavy, bous, wooden bowl quite distinct both from the leather bound beaters of the Hausa or the wooden beaters of Nupe and the Yoruba. Again, parallels can be drawn with beaters from many weaving groups to

the west of Nigeria, those of the Baulé in the Ivory Coast perhaps being particularly close to the Chadic type. Third, these looms use wooden heddle pulleys of quite distinctive form. Some resemble the Nupe shape. Others, like those of the Waja, are almost specific to that group only. In the use of pulleys, again, the parallel is close with loom equipment elsewhere to the west of Nigeria. All the looms of this family which we have encountered are used for the production of very narrow strips, usually two inches or less, which, in turn, implies light drag weights. The normal drag weight is carried either in an old enamelled plate or bowl, rather in the manner of the *turkudi* loom, or on a piece of matting or basketwork made specially for this purpose. The weaver sits in a more or less upright posture on a seat. His pedals are of the side type but, unlike the Hausa loom, they are not attached to the ground by ropes: they rest at one end on the ground and derive their movement from pressure against a fulcrum provided by a stick or a stone.

183 Kanuri weaver working on a typical Chadic loom in Konduga, near Maiduguri.



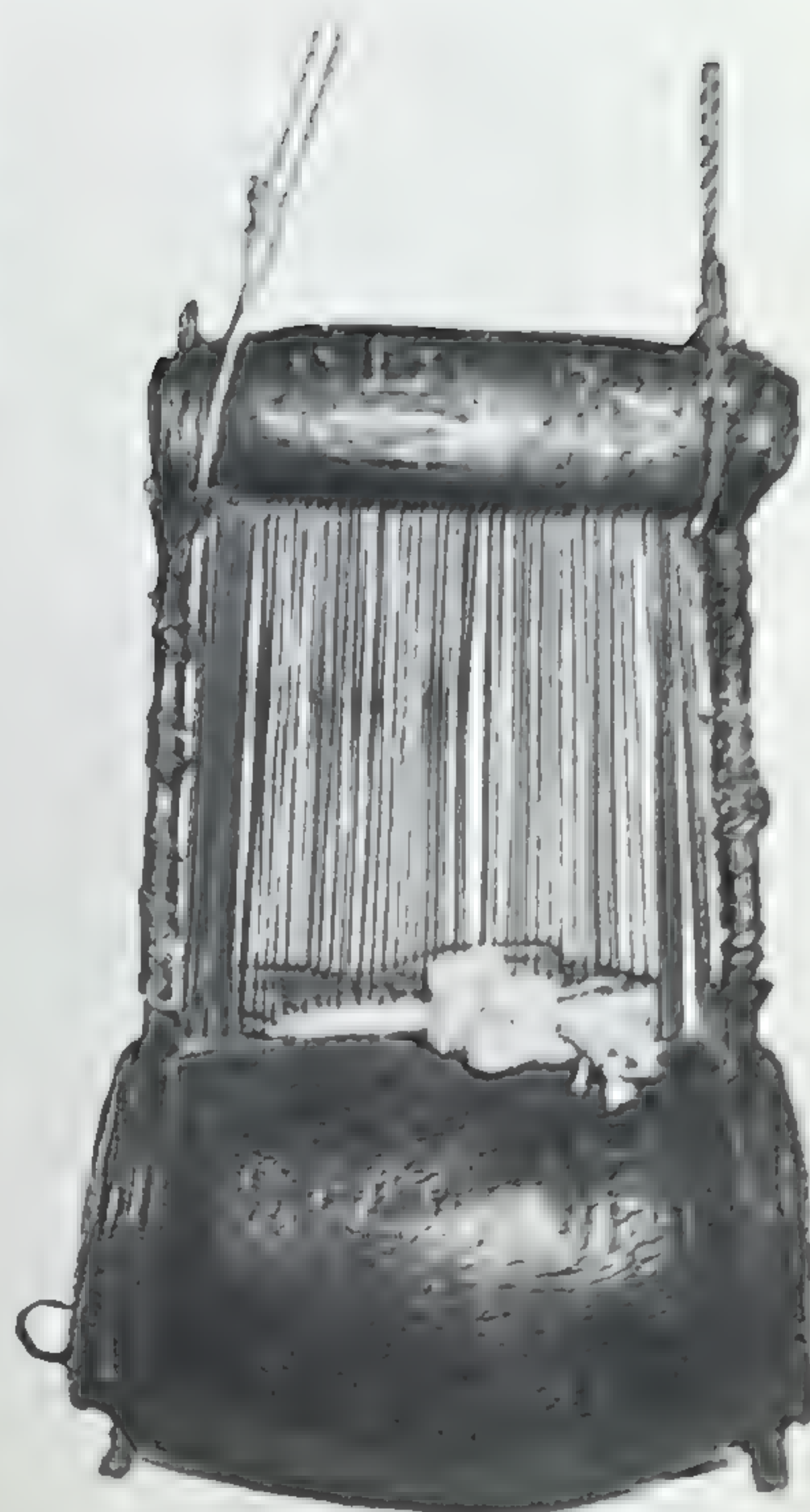
Kanuri weaving

There is a cultural divide of sorts along the main road between Kano and Maiduguri in the region of Damaturu. As far as the local products of the men's horizontal narrow loom are concerned, on the west we tend to find cloths of the general Hausa variety as defined in the last chapter: on the east, while we still find Hausa cloths, garments, shrouds and blankets brought in by long distance traders, the locally made cloths belong to a different environment.

The present capital of Borno State, Maiduguri, is a fairly new town, founded at the very beginning of this century. The earlier capital, in the days when Barth and Nachtigal were making their great journeys, was Kukawa, to the northeast of Maiduguri and close to the shore of Lake Chad.¹ Weavers around Maiduguri, today, are not too easy to find. In earlier times they were more numerous. Barth reported that in and about Uje, very near the site of the modern Maiduguri, there were villages famous for the production of gowns (*tobes*) called *amagdi* which were a feature of Kukawa market. Another town near Maiduguri, Dikwa, on the eastern side on the road to Ngala and the Cameroun border, so Barth noted in the early 1850s, was famous for its weaving of local cotton and its tailoring into 'shirts'.²

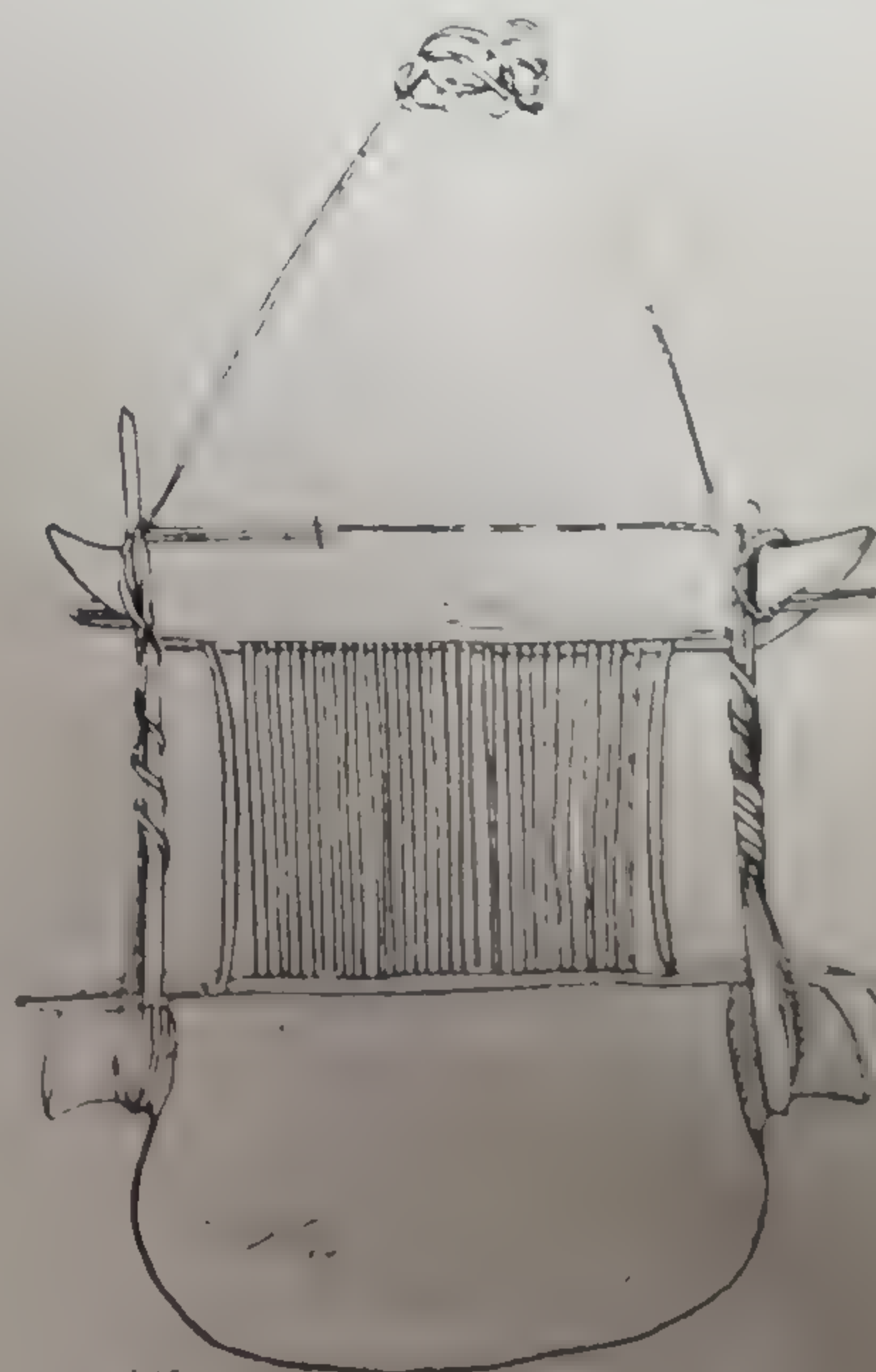
In 1979 we could find no trace of weaving in Dikwa. We found some Hausa weavers at work in Maiduguri. Kanuri weavers were rather thin on the ground; but we located some at Ala near Marte a few miles north of Dikwa, at Konduga to the southeast of Maiduguri, and at one or two other places. Our information was that as one went southwards through Dumboa towards Biu one should find increasing numbers of Kanuri at work at their looms; and that the Kanuri weaving region extended to Mubi on the border with Gongola State.

The weaving at Konduga was typical of the Kanuri version of the craft. The looms were covered by rough sheds made of guineacorn stalk as shade. The loom was very narrow and cramped, the front uprights supporting the warp beam being both high and close together. The weaver sat in a peculiar posture, so upright that, in fact, he seemed to bend over the warp beam which lay in his lap, only supported rather loosely by ropes stretching to the rear uprights of the loom. The wooden heddle pulley, *mantada*, was carved in the form of a fork surmounted by a top knot, somewhat in the Nupe or Yoruba manner, with the nut wheel so common elsewhere in Nigeria, here called the *tom*.



184 Heavy wooden Waja beater of a type also characteristic of Kanuri looms. Compare with 185, drawing of a Mundang beater from Lake Leré, showing characteristics shared by other Chadic weavers, such as the Waja and Kanuri. From MacLeod, 1912.

The heddles, *arina*, possessed only some fifty leashes: they were intended for a strip of just about one inch in width. The beater, *gwoli sabi*, had a heavy wooden bowl which was connected to the top member by vertical rods on either side of the teeth, the whole assemblage being bound together with leather thongs.



185



186 A Kanuri weaver's wife demonstrating her skill in spinning cotton yarn for her husband. Extra yarn is sold in the local markets. Ala, near Lake Chad.

Here again was an arrangement with many parallels outside Nigeria to the west, but quite different from either Yoruba or Hausa practice. The shuttle, *kawoni*, was much like the Hausa shuttle: its bobbin was called *kuroro*. The drag weight consisted of sand placed either on a circular mat or in an enamelled plate.

The over all effect of the Kanuri looms which we saw was one of confined space, the weaver sitting crouched over the breast beam enclosed, as if in a cage, by a loom frame both narrow and compressed longitudinally. In some ways the general impression, though not of course the details, recalled the Hausa *turkudi* loom with its improbably small dimensions. It may be that horizontal looms set up to weave very narrow strips do tend, by the very nature of things, to look a trifle odd. Whatever one's reaction to the first sight of this loom may be, the fact remains that the form is of some antiquity. One of the earliest weaving pictures to be published relating to the Chadic region of Africa, that by Talbot (taken in 1911), shows looms of the typical Kanuri form in the extreme northern tip of Cameroun

among the Kotoko. Olive MacLeod, in whose most informative travel narrative this picture appears, also illustrates a beater from another Chadic group, the Mundang, from the Lake Leré region of the Chad-Cameroun borderland, which is essentially of the Kanuri form though more elaborate in its details.³ The implications are that the Kanuri loom, or looms very like it, extends east of the Nigerian border into Cameroun and Chad, and that they have been around in much their present form for a long time.

One of our Kanuri weaver informants, an old man called Sama in the Ala region, told us that as far as he knew this craft depended almost entirely on hand spun cotton. Sama's wife spun all the yarn he needed. It was possible, however, to obtain hand spun yarn in the market. The cloth he wove was typical of the Borno Kanuri output, *gabaga*, a plain white strip between one and two inches in width, marketed in wheel form by specialist dealers who make the rounds of the villages. The unsewn strip was expensive, and it was not a dominant feature of any Borno market which we

visited, there being usually one or two sellers with a small number of wheels on display. The main use of *gabaga* cloth today was for the manufacture of shrouds, *kalaon*, which were made up by specialist tailors and sold in major markets. *Gabaga* was also used for sewing up into men's gowns of the *riga* type. Of women's use of *gabaga* we could find no direct evidence, women's wrappers in dark blue appearing to be made from imported broadloom cloth, *kham*. Among the wealthy in Borno of both sexes there is evidence of a tradition of wearing garments made from *turkudi*-type cloth brought in from Hausaland.

In the village of Lomani, on the road from Maiduguri to the Cameroun border and about midway between Dikwa and Ngala, we met what could well be the easternmost of all weavers in Nigeria. They were probably Kotoko with origins in Makari over the Cameroun border, rather than mainstream Kanuri. In their weaving equipment, however, they could not be distinguished from other Kanuri weavers. Like the rest, they were weaving hand spun cotton, for which they used the Hausa term *farin gonawa* ('farm cotton'), to make a plain white strip destined for use in shrouds. These weavers confirmed our information from elsewhere that it was ritually essential for shrouds to be made of hand spun cotton strip.

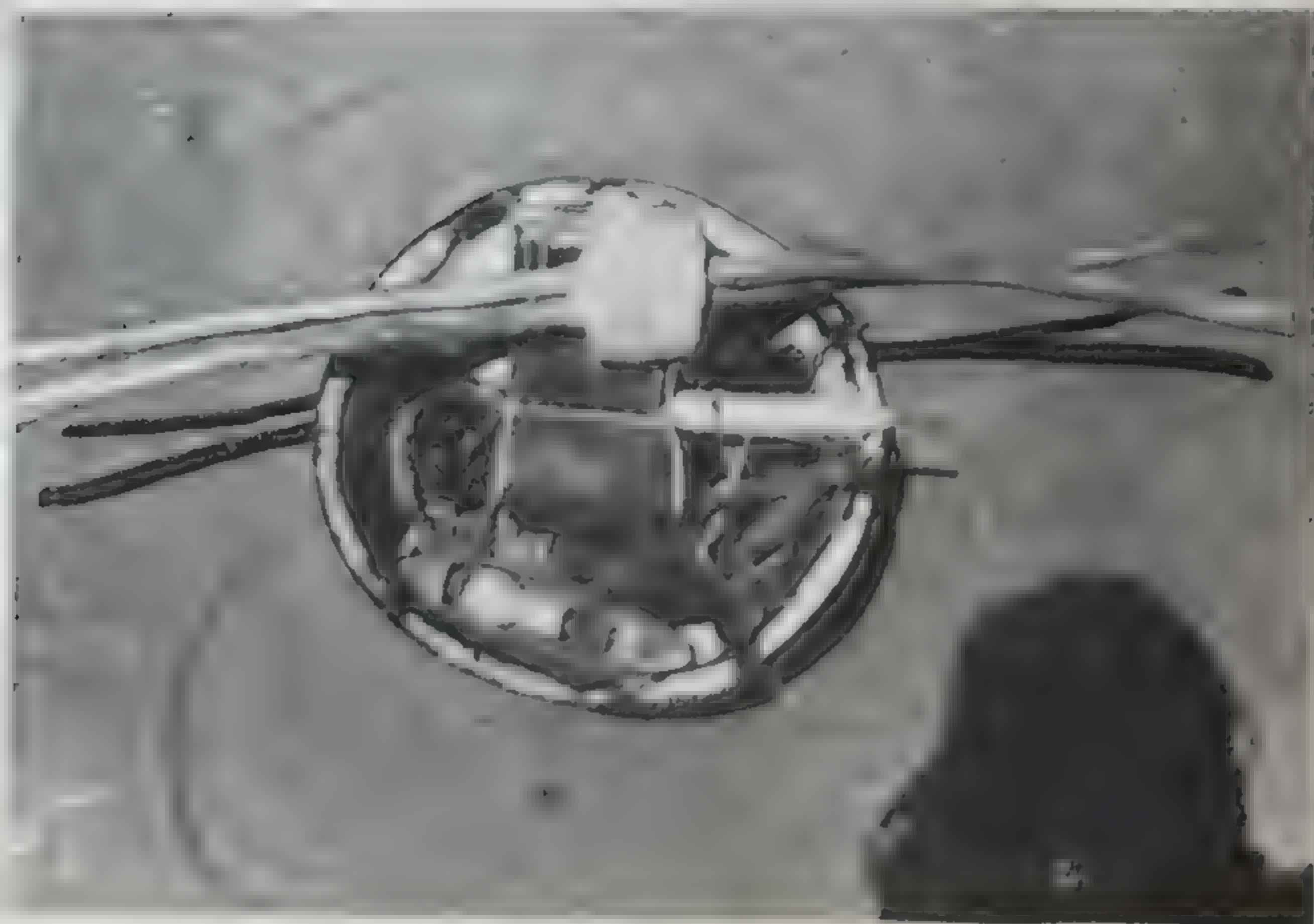
Among the Kanuri, according to Brenner, weavers had traditionally been freemen, *talakawa*, though, along with drummers, blacksmiths and the like, of rather low social status.⁴ The free status of weavers in this part of Africa was noted by Denham in the early 1820s, referring to the inhabitants along the banks of the Logone river, not far from Ngala and today on the



188 Two Kanuri women wearing shiny blue strip cloths. The Kotoko were famous for their indigo dyeing. MacLeod, 1912.

Chad-Cameroun border.⁵ At this early date there was also a great deal of indigo dyeing to produce a product with a high gloss, much as is now still done in Kura and other Hausa dyeing centres, for use in both male and female gowns; and Olive MacLeod's book, published in 1912, shows such garments being worn. Nachtigal, who travelled in Borno in the 1870s, also refers to much weaving and dyeing activity in that part of eastern Borno which now straddles the Nigerian, Cameroun and Chad borders. He listed no less than six types of local robe of the general *riga* pattern, garments which he described collectively as *kulgu* (pl. *kulgua*) which competed in quality with imported garments from Hausaland.⁶ Barth, in the early 1850s, also saw much dyeing in Borno, particularly at Ugi and Maban, near the present site of Maiduguri, which produced a very fine *kulgu* known as *kulgu amagadi*. The area was also famous for shiny beaten indigo women's gowns of *turkudi*-like appearance.⁷ Another dye centre, seen by Nachtigal, was in the Kotoko region of Makari, today in the extreme north of Cameroun.⁸

In Nachtigal's day (the 1870s) cloth was still used in Borno to perform many of the functions associated with money. It could take the form either of strip wound into a wheel, or in certain sewn-up garments. Barth refers to a *kulgu dora* made of a strip so coarse 'that it was quite unfit for use' except as a means of payment.⁹ If an item purchased in the town was worth



187 A Kanuri dragstone basin containing all the working parts of the loom. Lomani, Borno.

less than the value of the garment, then, according to Nachtigal, the garment could simply be cut in half.¹⁰ Barth, commenting on this form of currency, described a would-be buyer at a market having to change Maria Theresa Dollars into cowrie shells, and then exchanging shells for *kulgu* robes with which the actual purchase would take place.¹¹

The monetary use of cloth is of great antiquity in this part of Africa. Al Maqrizi, who lived from 1364 to 1442, made the following remarks about Kanem-Borno:¹²

As regards money, they use a kind of cloth which they make and which is called 'Wendy'. Each piece is ten cubits long, but for a facility of exchange it is cut up into pieces of a quarter of a cubit or smaller. Other substances such as shells of different kinds and pieces of copper or gold are equally used in commerce and their value is estimated in an equivalent amount of cloth.

Something like the use of 'Wendy' (*dandi, dindi, windi*) also was to be found eastwards of Kanem-Borno towards the Nile. Browne, right at the end of the eighteenth century, mentions the monetary use of

189 Buduma woman from Lake Chad wearing typical locally woven strip cloth. MacLeod, 1912.



190 Roll of Kanuri gabaga, once used as cloth money in Borno.

cloth in Darfur:¹³ the cloth involved, which Browne called *tokeas*, is certainly the same as the *toqqiya* which Nachtigal some eighty years later saw being used for the same purpose right across from Kordofan to Wadai on the edge of Borno.¹⁴ Barth found shirt-like garments from Borno being used as money in Kanem, that region on the north shore of Lake Chad historically associated with Borno since medieval times but today lying within the limits of the Republic of Chad.¹⁵

There can be no doubt as to the importance of cloth in the traditional value system of Borno and adjacent regions. It will cause no surprise, therefore, to find clothing important in the ceremonial of the Borno Court. Major Denham, for example, who had an audience with the Shehu of Borno, Mai Ibrahim, in 1823, saw courtiers who went to enormous lengths to increase their social stature by enlarging their physical size with layer upon layer of garments, 'eight, ten and twelve shirts of different colours, that they wear one over the other [to] help to increase this greatness of person'.¹⁶ The Shehu rewarded his followers with gifts of clothing. Many taxes were collected in the form of cloth; and the farming out of such taxes was a major source of patronage for the Shehu. One such tax was the *kulga askarabe*, levied in the form of gowns on non-Muslims and used to support the *Kachella* slave army.¹⁷

It is to be regretted that the Borno Court robes observed by nineteenth century travellers from Denham to Nachtigal do not appear to be represented in museum collections either in or outside Nigeria.



191 White Kanuri kulgu robe showing typical Borno style neck and embroidery. Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool.

Nachtigal acquired some magnificently embroidered women's blouses of the kind known as *gomaji*: these are now in Berlin, but, made from broadcloth, they lie beyond the scope of this book.¹⁸ The tradition behind them still survives in Borno markets in two forms: first, in embroidered short wrappers of imported cloth; and second, in white smocks, rather crudely embroidered, of strip cloth designed to meet the taste requirements of the pastoral Fulani. Olive MacLeod reproduces a photograph of the Shehu of Borno taken in 1911.¹⁹ He is magnificently arrayed in Arab type headdress, a coat which would not have looked out of place in Khartoum under the Mahdi, a thick sash further tightened by a cartridge-filled belt, and an undercoat of what looks very much like silk *ikat* either from Aleppo or the Yemen. He cuts a superb figure; but on grounds of the typology of dress he would be more at home in the Arabia seen by Sir Richard Burton than the Kano observed by Heinrich Barth. It is probable, however, that the fine robes of this period of



192 Rare picture of the Shehu of Borno, taken in 1911. MacLeod 1912. Note Arab type clothing and ikat undercoat.

193 A Borno Chief wearing an extremely elaborate embroidered robe, probably of Borno origin. The two attendants are wearing typical Nupe robes from Bida. Palmer, 1936.



Borno origin, woven by Kanuri and their sub-groups such as the Kotoko, would have looked very much like the *riga* and related garments from Hausaland, based on a narrow white or indigo strip and embroidered with designs which, while possessing distinct Borno features, would still fall within the general sphere of traditional Nigerian embroidery.

Today, the mainstay of the Kanuri weaving craft is the manufacture of strip for shrouds (*kalaon*). These were the only cloths of local manufacture which we could find in the main Maiduguri market in 1979: there was one section where sellers of shrouds could meet both suppliers and customers. These shrouds in Maiduguri market included types which we had not encountered in Hausaland, such as a variety of completely plain cloth of very narrow strip, from less than one inch to about two inches at most, provided with sleeves in the traditional *riga* manner, but with no pocket and no head opening. Some of this variety, including one with the narrowest strip, just over half an inch, we encountered in Nigeria, had short slits at the top of either sleeve which could have served for hand openings for the deceased, perhaps with his arms

folded over his chest and his head covered, as with a hood, by the totally closed centre of the garment.

Some of these shrouds were certainly made in Borno by Kanuri and related weavers. Others came from far afield. Discussion in markets in Maiduguri, Gombe and Yola revealed a quite complex trading pattern in which these shrouds played a part. Hausa long-distance traders, *fatauci*, could, for example, set out from Kano or Katsina with cloth from that neighbourhood, including some of the wide fabrics made by the *chakerikeri* weavers and *luru* blankets. These, perhaps acquired in rural markets in Hausaland, would be taken first to Bauchi market and then on a route through Gombe, Numan, Yola and Mubi to Maiduguri. As original stock was disposed of, so local wares were purchased. For example, in the Gombe region there were a number of weavers producing blankets of the *luru* type: there was a market for those in Numan and Yola. From Yola northwards the traders could pick up *bullam* cloth (see below) and its Kanuri equivalent, *gabaga*, which ended up as shrouds in Maiduguri market, whence, no doubt, it could be distributed further into the countryside. The traders would then return to Hausaland with their profits; and the cycle would begin over again. No doubt other cycles existed.



194 Fine Kanuri shroud known as *kalaon*, sewn from half-inch strips of white *gabaga*. Note absence of head opening. A shroud of this quality is highly valued. Maiduguri.

One linking Kano, Nguru, Potiskum and Maiduguri for example, would make good sense.

One consequence of such cycles or chains of marketing is that enquiries in any one market about the origins of a type of cloth may produce misleading replies. One example will illustrate this point. In Gombe, where we first encountered in 1979 the plain white shrouds without head openings already referred to, we were told that they came from Maiduguri. At Maiduguri market we were told that the same shrouds came from Gombe. The answer, of course, is that they came from neither; but, rather, that they originated in any number of villages in between these two big markets which, along with Yola, mark out three points on a triangle which embraces much of the area of both *gabaga* and *bullam* production. A Maiduguri market seller, buying from a travelling dealer coming immediately from Gombe, would tend to attribute all that dealer's wares to Gombe; and a Gombe market seller, with a dealer from Maiduguri, could make the opposite assumption. There can be no doubt that this confusion between actual origin, market pattern and place of sale has much complicated the establishment of a typology of textiles not only in Nigeria but also throughout West Africa. Only by visiting a very large number of

markets, as we were fortunate enough to have been able to do in Nigeria in 1978 and 1979, can one begin to get a picture of the underlying pattern of both manufacture and distribution.

Adamawa

Adamawa, a Fulani Emirate which was still in process of formation when Barth visited it in the middle of the nineteenth century, is now represented in Nigeria by Gongola State, and in Cameroun by the district round Garoua. Its capital is Yola. Adamawa is the home of *bullam* cloth, a narrow strip woven by Marghai, Fali, Bata, Kilba and Nzangi peoples, all of whom have mingled to varying degree with intrusive Fulbe groups. The major weaving areas are around Zummo, Sharau (or Sarawu) and Belel. The name *bullam*, used generally for the strip woven here is, so we were told by a number of people in Yola, of Fulfulde (Fulbe or Fulani) linguistic origin. Abraham, however, has it in his dictionary as a Hausa word. We would suspect, because it is used for this particular purpose nowhere else in Nigeria, that the Fulfulde theory has much merit. Be that as it may, the term seems to have been borrowed by other groups in the general region of



195 'White bullam' cloth, Adamawa. Shows the restrained embroidery.

Adamawa: the Bagirmi version, for example, is *bolne*, with imported gowns from Kano and Nupe called *bolgodani*.²⁰ Another name for *bullam*, used by Barth and presumably from a language not Fulfulde, is *leppi*.²¹ According to J.-G. Gauthier, the Fali in Cameroun use the word *djolu* for the same material.²² Since there are in Adamawa, as elsewhere in northeastern Nigeria, Hausa immigrants, it is more than probable that *bullam* is also woven by Hausa.

Bullam has a very dense warp-faced web consisting of some 54 warps to the inch, with a light weft pick of about 20 to the inch. The density is achieved by using warp threads much thicker than those used in the weft, which is, in fact, the reverse of the Hausa practice in, for example, *sawaye*. Some of the white *bullam* gowns from Zummo contain both the best quality of yarn and texture of weave to be found anywhere in Nigeria today. Despite the high quality of strip, however, gowns made from *bullam* are not embellished with anything like the elaboration of decoration lavished, for example, by the embroiderers of Bida. Adamawa embroidery on *riga* is restrained. We were much helped by the Lamido of Adamawa through whose Court we were able to have this subject explained to us. On the front, on the left hand side there are usually two small *aska* ('knives') and, on the pocket, a design of four boxes known as *subumatpati*.²³ On both the right side front and centre back there is the circle motif usually found on such *riga*, called *tambari*. To accompany the *riga* there is a pair of trousers called *harsaka*. In addition to *riga*-type gowns there are large smocks made from *bullam*, known as *binjama*. The Lamido of Adamawa most kindly showed us one of his better *riga* made from *bullam*, and a superb garment it was, with a one-inch strip woven from a cotton yarn so fine and soft that it could well have been silk. For ceremonial use the pure white of this fine *bullam* has long had a special appeal to the Fulani aristocracy;²⁴ and the example which we were shown by the Lamido was a worthy specimen of this genre of textile.

The non-Muslim people of Adamawa have also placed great importance on *bullam* cloth. The Fali, for example, both in Nigeria and across the border in Cameroun, use *bullam* strip (or its Kanuri equivalent, *gabaga*) as part of the payment of a dowry; and their men wear garments based on this material, a rectangular apron, *tipeshe*, with a few blue or blue and white strips intermixed with the plain white, and decorated with embroidery using geometric shapes,



196 Fali *bullam* gown worn here by the Lamido of Tibati in Mbum. The embroidery shows local Bamum influence. F. Thorbecke, 1914.

and also a large white cloth either worn formally, toga fashion (with the right shoulder bare), or draped casually over the left shoulder. The same Fali use narrow white strip, either *gabaga* or *bullam*, to bind up the bodies of their dead: Gauthier and Jansen have published a most striking photograph of such a corpse looking very much like an Egyptian mummy but fixed in an upright seated posture with the arms stretched forward.²⁵ This practice, alone, would suffice to maintain some demand for the narrow *gabaga* or *bullam* strip woven along this northern stretch of the Nigeria-Cameroun border.

Yola, the capital of old Adamawa and today the capital of Gongola State, does not seem to be a major weaving centre; but in the Lamido's Court we were told that much weaving still goes on around Garoua, not far away up the Benue valley in Cameroun. Traditionally, Garoua still retains close links with Yola despite the presence of an international frontier. Both weaving and dyeing in the Garoua region were described by Dr Siegfried Passarge who took part in the German expedition to Adamawa in 1893-4. Cloth of yellow, blue and red as well as white was being



197. *Gravens among the Bamum in the Fouban region of Cameroun, which show Borno and Adamawa influence. Basel Mission, c. 1890.*

produced. There were dye pits of a kind characteristic of Hausaland; and dyed cloth was being beaten in just the manner we have described in Chapter 3 (page 92) in connection with Kura.²⁶

Dr Passarge published a drawing of the heart of a loom, warp, beater, heddles and shuttle, which must certainly rank as one of the earliest detailed illustrations of such equipment from what was then a very remote part of the African continent.²⁷ Unfortunately, there are reasons to doubt that the equipment illustrated by Passarge either was Hausa or actually came from Adamawa at all.²⁸

If Dr Passarge's loom is neither Hausa nor from Adamawa, yet we do still have quite early German evidence of the presence of the Hausa with their characteristic looms in this region. The source is C. Arriens, the artist who accompanied the great German traveller Leo Frobenius, and whose drawings are often marvels of acute observation. The weaver in question was drawn at work by Arriens in 1911 in the village of Kontcha which lies about eighty miles as the crow flies due south of Yola,²⁹ but just on the Cameroun side today of the Nigeria-Cameroun border. The loom is

typical Hausa in all respects, basically of the *zugu* or *sawaye* kind. It has a rocker instead of pulley. The breast beam is located beneath the weaver's knees, indicating a narrow warp. One interesting feature is the use of animal bones as pegs to attach the cords locating the ends of the more or less sideways pedals, rather in the manner which is so common today in Zaria. We would indeed be fortunate if all travellers in Africa had been both as observant and as able draftsmen as Arriens.

The Waja weavers

The Waja are a Chadic group (according to Murdock) who occupy the extreme southeast corner of Bauchi State to the south of Gombe.³⁰ They are still well off the Nigerian main road system, though, no doubt, the economic development of the Gombe region will soon improve their communications with the rest of Nigeria. Their main towns are Bangu, Tallase and Galengu.

The Waja loom, while clearly related to the loom used by the Kanuri, is still very distinctive. The basis is a framework of three uprights linked by two horizon-



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tal bars. Two uprights are situated at the rear, thick poles stuck in the ground on either side of the weaver. The front upright is a forked branch placed some six feet in front of the rear uprights. Across the fork is tied the warp beam; and each tine of the fork supports one of the horizontal bars. At this point, both horizontal bars and warp beam are higher than the head of the weaver who works in a low seated posture. The horizontal bars are made up from guineacorn stalks tied together in a rather crude-looking bundle which is none the less sufficiently rigid for its purpose. The rear of the horizontal bars is attached to the back uprights at a point about level with the weaver's shoulders. Across the horizontal bars is placed a cross bar, not attached by anything but the force of gravity, from which are suspended the heddles and the beater. The beater is very similar to that of the Kanuri, with a heavy and bulbous wooden bowl tied to the top member by wooden rods which go right through both bowl and top member; and the whole is bound together with thongs of leather. The pulley is a heavy affair of wood, with rectangular sides decorated with rather simple geometric design. The top of the pulley



198 and 199 Waja looms in Bangu. Although clearly related to the Chadic group, these looms have distinctive features, such as the forked warp beam upright and unusually long horizontal bars



200 Waja wooden
heddle pulley from
Galengu. $6\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

stands up from the shoulders something rather like a chimney pot. It is provided with a hole for the suspension cord. The over all effect of the pulley is that of a squarish gong with handle. We know no very close parallel for it in West Africa; and it is significantly different from the pulleys with fork-shaped legs used by the Kanuri and Kotoko and already described. The heddles are attached to fairly long side pedals which each operate against a fulcrum on the ground, usually a heavy stone. The breast beam, which is positioned beneath the weaver's knees, is strange. It consists of two poles with the tensioning rod, of wood, twisted between them. The breast beam, in this double form, is attached to the two rear uprights by cords. The shuttle is similar to that used by the Hausa though a bit longer than the Kanuri version of the same form. The drag weight usually is an enamelled bowl filled with sand.

The following are some Waja names for loom parts:

gyaru—beater
kangau—pulley
lokiyu—heddles
konguru—shuttle

The Waja weaver calls himself *nerutatawan*, 'someone weaving white cloth'.

The Waja weave a white cloth, *farin Waja*, about two inches wide, and, in so far as we could ascertain, nothing else. The strip is sold in wheels from which lengths can be cut, the standard units of measure being the *chugu*, one arm's length, and the *lowan Waja*, the length of both arms fully outstretched. The main use of *farin Waja* is in the manufacture of *rigas* and women's wrappers and, of course, shrouds. It can be dyed deep blue with indigo, and beaten in the manner so common

throughout northern Nigeria. The main centre for the sewing and other processing of *farin Waja* strip is Tallase.

In Bangu, the Chief, Mallam Ahmadu Sale, was kind enough to talk to us and give us information about the craft of Waja weaving. He agreed that the craft was on the wane, in part due to the consequences of the cotton boom in the early 1960s which had raised the price of yarn to a point where the economics of handloom weaving were seriously affected, and in part to the attractions of other occupations to the young now offered by Nigerian economic development, the advance of which was particularly evident in the whole Gombe region. While we could not arrive at a total figure for the population of Waja weavers, on the basis of our information it could not be much more than a hundred or two. There were about fifty weavers in Galengu, about thirty in Bangu, and perhaps a similar number in Tallase. Other villages had two or three weavers; but there were many villages like Biliri, Gujuba, Awak and Kamu, which had none. In one village, Swa, we found only two weavers. In another, Dogonruwa, we found no Waja weavers but, instead, a Hausa weaver with his characteristic apparatus who had migrated there from the west and whose father had lived in Kura and worked as a weaver of *turkudi*.

The Waja weaving industry, based on a very distinctive loom, was directed towards internal Waja use rather than external markets. Only by travelling through Waja country could one come across it. Our own encounter with this craft provided us with a salutary lesson. A series of chance meetings brought us to this region, which we could never have reached without the generous help of the Gombe Development Project and its Director, John Hall. As we bounced over rough tracks in our borrowed four-wheel-drive vehicle we wondered how many little pockets of self-contained weavers we were missing because their existence had never been remarked upon in the literature. The Waja, at least, had not escaped the observant eye of Temple, who commented both on the quality of Waja cloth and on its use among the Waja as a form of currency.

The Waja weavers depend upon hand spun cotton, grown locally in a region where cotton abounds. The spinning is done by women; but it is also done by men who also do some of the work of dyeing. Women, however, prepare the dye baths, derived either from wild indigo or from the pods of the Katang tree another source of blue colour.

The Mumuye weavers

Living in a remote corner of old Adamawa, today in Gongola State, are the Mumuye, a people closely associated with the Zinna and the Yakoko and several others, in a pattern of relationships which both Temple and Meek found complex.³¹ The Mumuye, and the Zinna and Yakoko (who are sub-divisions of Mumuye) are weavers; and their peculiar cloth finds an outlet in Nigeria only among peoples belonging to the Mumuye family in its widest sense. The Mumuye centre is Zinna (or Zing) thirty miles as the crow flies southwest of Yola. Apart from Zinna, principal Mumuye villages are Sawa, Monkin, Bajama, Mayo Belwa, Jalingo and Mayo Faran.

The Mumuye loom belongs to a family quite distinct from that so far considered in this book. It is a raised ground loom. The warp is staked out on the ground, or on poles above it; and the weaver, inserting the weft, weaves his way along the warp from one end to the other. The arrangement is then dismantled, the completed cloth rolled up, and a new warp set out. Traces of this approach to weaving can be detected in certain horizontal looms in West Africa, in Sierra Leone, Guinea-Conakry and Liberia; but there would seem to be no parallels in Nigeria. The Mumuye loom, in fact, is closely related to a number of loom varieties in Cameroun; and it really is the extreme western end of a weaving complex which the process of boundary formation has included within Nigerian territory.

Ground looms are common among desert nomads both in western Asia and in the Sahara. They are, in this habitat, very much the preserve of women. Both Denham and Barth saw such looms being used by nomad women in Kanem.³² Technically, these desert ground looms are quite similar to those found in Cameroun and among the Mumuye in Nigeria. The



201 The Mumuye langtang loom in Zing. The width of the web is fourteen inches. In these raised ground looms the weaver sits beside the warp to work.

...that the examples in both Cameroun and Nigeria are used exclusively by men, just as are, with very rare exceptions, all varieties of the West African horizontal narrow strip loom all the way across from Senegal to Lake Chad. While it is tempting to derive the Mumuye and related looms in Cameroun from direct practice, this change in sex on the part of the weaver poses a major question far from easy to answer.

Another hypothesis would be to derive these Cameroun and Mumuye ground looms from the vertical raffia loom which is used by men all the way southwards from Cross River State in Nigeria through Cameroun, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Zaire and deep into Angola. One could argue that demand for a longer warp resulted in the vertical raffia loom being turned through an angle of ninety degrees to lie along the ground. One could, of course, argue equally well for the opposite process. Both vertical and ground looms are found in Madagascar, an island where many textile influences may have been exerted by settlers originating in Southeast Asia.

The Mumuye ground loom is, apart from its horizontal alignment, technically very similar to the woman's upright loom in Nigeria which is the subject of another part of this book. To derive one from the other, however, is again to involve a change in the sex of the weaver. Even though, in the Nigerian environment it is rather exotic, it can be seen that the Mumuye loom could well form the basis of much speculation.



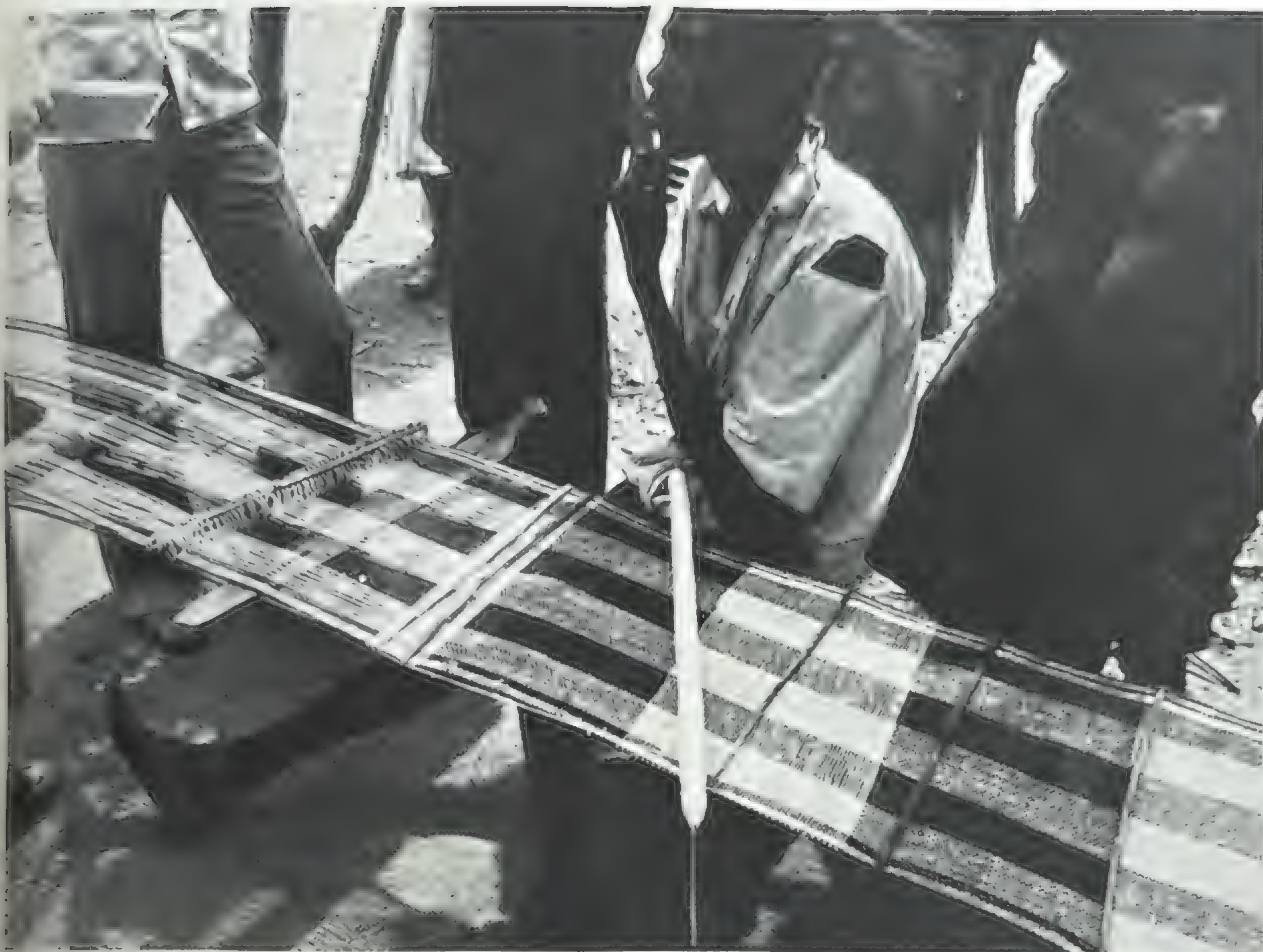
203 Mumuye man spinning in Zing. The pot (202) contains powdered chalk to aid the spinning of the coarse cotton yarn.

There are small groups of Mumuye weavers in the villages around Zinna. We concentrated for our research on a group of weavers in the village of Tagalang where every family had its loom. The bulk of the craft was in the hands of the men, who not only wove but also dyed and spun. The women's contribution appeared to be confined to the cultivation and preparation of cotton ready for spinning. This distribution of labour, to judge from nineteenth century photographs in the possession of the Basel Mission, is of some antiquity.

The essentials of the Mumuye loom are as follows. The usual length of the warp is about thirty feet. Two stakes at either end of a stretch of this distance, each pair being set about sixteen to twelve inches apart, provide the loom frame. These stakes, or uprights, are a little over two feet high, and they are well fixed into



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204 Mumuye langtang loom in Zing. The weaver manipulates the single heddle by hand and opens the shed with the flat sword stick. Note use of long bobbin type shuttle and tenter hooks across the web.

the ground as a permanent feature of the loom. Across each pair of uprights is tied a cross bar which serves the function of the breast beam in the horizontal loom though, of course, it does not move in any way during weaving. The warp is wound between the two cross bars at either end of the loom, there being usually about 70 loops giving a warp of 140 threads. The loom may be in the open or it may be covered with a roughly built shed of sticks and matting. The weaver sits beside the warp with his legs stretched beneath it; and his seat has to be moved along the warp as weaving proceeds from one end to the other. His feet play no part in the weaving operation.

The loom has a single floating heddle, consisting of a pair of sticks around and between which is wound thick yarn to make a series of loops through which alternate warp threads are run while the other warp threads are missed out. Thus one shed is made by lifting the heddle. The other shed is formed by the

presence of a cross bar, a fairly thick piece of raffia palm. The countershed (that not made by the heddle) is produced with the help of a swordstick inserted into the spaces kept open by the cross bar. Warp tension is also helped by the use of four floating warp shed sticks. The shuttle, or bobbin, consists of a stick, about two and a half feet in length, on which is wound the yarn. The whole process, and the use of long shuttle and swordstick, is very like that typical of the Nigerian woman's upright loom. The woven warp is kept from contracting by the use of tenterhooks, here nothing but sticks pointed at either end and stuck across the warp, the points entering near the selv-edges. These tenterhooks are spaced, longitudinally, between six inches and a foot apart.

The cloth made on this apparatus is called by the Mumuye *langtang*. It can be plain white, but some kind of warp striping is common in either brown or blue. There may also be weft patterning by the use of two shuttles carrying different coloured yarn to produce either weft bands or large checks. The final

cloth is of a very coarse texture, so coarse, indeed, as to have many of the properties of netting.

The cotton yarn is spun by the men using a long distaff (two and a half feet) and a spindle almost as long and weighted with a metal disc. As he works, the spinner lubricates his fingers with powder carried in a pot made from half a small coconut and suspended by a cord from his left wrist. After spinning, the yarn is wound tightly on to a skein holder consisting of a bamboo pole about four feet long with cross pieces stuck through either end. Dyeing is based on local substances, particularly the seeds contained in pods from the Katang tree after fermenting. Apart from steeping in a dye bath, the cloth is also rubbed with alkaline mud from certain ponds in the neighbourhood, and, finally, exposed to sunlight which both dries and oxidizes it to produce shades varying from black to brown.

The weavers at Tagalang provided us with the following technical terms in their language:

- langtang*—woven cloth from the Mumuye loom
- bo langtang*—heddle
- la langtang*—swordstick
- laa langtang*—tenterhooks
- la route*—shuttle
- la kiyn*—fixed warp cross bar
- la kang*—floating warp cross bars
- gugurute*—coconut bowl for holding lubricant for spinning

The weavers at Tagalang told us that there was but one quality of *langtang* cloth. It was usually woven to order; but a certain quantity found its way to local markets through the hands of specialist dealers. We visited one such market, at Monkin, to find that the *langtang* trade was entirely separate from the normal cloth trade. In one corner of the market, in the shade of a tree, sat a small group of *langtang* sellers, each with a very small stock. *Langtang* is marketed just as it comes off the loom, after winding into tight rolls. It is not sewn up into garments at this stage, or in any other way modified. From the display at Monkin one could see that the repertoire of Mumuye cloth patterns was extremely limited: simple warp stripes in brown, blue or black, weft blocks and large checks in the same shades.

There seemed to be two basic uses for *langtang*, both confined to people of the Mumuye group in its wider sense. It could be made into wrappers for women and rather similar male garments, both in the main worn at

the major Mumuye religious festivals and clan gatherings; and it could be used for shrouds. The last was perhaps its most important function for the Mumuye. A warp length cut into three pieces and sewn together made up a shroud. So long as this funerary significance remains, no doubt there will be a few Mumuye weavers who will go on producing *langtang* undeterred by the cheapness of factory-made broadloom cloth.

It has already been noted that the Mumuye loom belongs to a family of looms found in Cameroun.³³ In some ways it is one of the most basic of such looms other than its being raised above the ground to enable the weaver to sit comfortably while he works. Some versions in Cameroun have acquired a variety of elaborations. The heddle can be supported on a raised frame. Special seats can be devised to enable the weaver to straddle the warp. There are even looms where, despite the basic ground loom layout, provision has been made for winding up the warp on a beam at one end and, thus, freeing the weaver from the length limitations imposed by the groundloom format. The typology of these fascinating Cameroun ground looms is a subject which falls outside the scope of the present book. To the best of our knowledge the Mumuye type described here is the only member of this species of weaving apparatus to have been identified in Nigeria.³⁴



205 Mumuye *langtang* rolls being sold in Monkin market. Each roll is carefully unrolled for inspection by customers

Apart from its various ritual and ceremonial functions, it is interesting to note that the *langtang* cloth produced on the Mumuye loom in this century still served also as a kind of currency. As late as 1929 a *langtang* roll had a trade value equal to about 4 shillings (20 pence, 40 cents), sufficient to purchase a medium sized goat, with a fixed rate of exchange with other currencies in Adamawa such as iron bars (*taji*) and rolls of *bullam* cloth.³⁵

Notes

- ¹ For a history of Borno in the century prior to the establishment of the Borno capital at Maiduguri in 1903, see: L. Brenner, *The Shehus of Kukawa. A History of the Al-Kanemi Dynasty of Bornu*, Oxford 1973.
- ² H. Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, London 1857-8, Vol. II, p. 307 and Vol. III, p. 139.
- ³ See: O. MacLeod, *Chiefs and Cities of Central Africa*, Edinburgh 1912.
- ⁴ Brenner, op. cit., p. 95.
- ⁵ D. Denham, H. Clapperton and Dr Oudney, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa in the Years 1822, 1823 and 1824*, London 1826, p. 246.
- ⁶ G. Nachtigal, *Sahara and Sudan*, Vol. II, *Bornu, Kanem, Borku, Ennedi*, trans. and ed. A. G. B. Fisher & H. J. Fisher, London 1979, pp. 182-6. We are most grateful to the publisher, Christopher Hurst, for enabling us to see this book while it was still in galley proof stage.
- ⁷ Barth, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 365.
- ⁸ Nachtigal, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 26.
- ⁹ Barth, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 312.
- ¹⁰ Nachtigal, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 346.
- ¹¹ Barth, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 312.
- ¹² Quoted in: T. Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives. An Historical Anthology*, London 1960, p. 77.
- ¹³ Browne, 'A Journey to Dar-Fur', in J. Pinkerton, *A General Collection of Voyages and Travels*, London 1814, Vol. XV.
- ¹⁴ Nachtigal, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 300.
- ¹⁵ Barth, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 75.
- ¹⁶ I. W. Bovill, ed., *Missions to the Niger*, Vol. II, Cambridge 1966, pp. 256-8.
- ¹⁷ Brenner, op. cit., pp. 110-11.
- ¹⁸ *Gomay* was a major category of garment along with *kulgu*, the former being the short smock and the latter the full robe. We have noted just this kind of classification among both the Yoruba and the Hausa. *Gomay* could be made either from narrow strip, as it no doubt was in the nineteenth century, in its more humble forms, or from imported broadloom cloth. For the Hausa and *gomay* in Berlin, see: B. Menzel, *Textilien aus Westafrika*, Berlin 1923, Vol. II, Pls. 152-7.
- ¹⁹ MacLeod, op. cit.
- ²⁰ Barth, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 384. See also: K. Kamm, *From Hausaland to Egypt*, London 1910, p. 276.
- ²¹ Barth, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 445.
- ²² J. G. Gauthier, *Les Fali, Hon et Tsalo*, Oosterhout 1969, p. 69.
- ²³ For an illustration of such a *riga*, see: S. Passarge, *Adamawa: Bericht über die Expedition des Deutschen Kamerun-Komitees in den Jahren 1893-94*, Berlin 1895, Pl. IX.
- ²⁴ See, for example: D. J. M. Muffet, *Concerning Brave Captains*, London 1964, p. 143.
- ²⁵ G. Jansen & J.-G. Gauthier, *Ancient Art of the Northern Cameroons: Sao and Fali*, Oosterhout 1973. The plates in the work, though sometimes of rather indifferent quality, show many interesting details of Fali dress.
- ²⁶ Passarge, op. cit., pp. 82-3.
- ²⁷ Passarge, op. cit., p. 84.
- ²⁸ Menzel, op. cit., Vol. I, Pls. 198, 311a and 311b.
- ²⁹ L. Frobenius, *Das sterbende Afrika*, Vol. I, Munich 1923, Pl. 52. This picture has been reproduced in: E. Broudy, *The Book of Looms*, New York 1979, p. 118.
- ³⁰ G. P. Murdock, *Africa, its Peoples and their Culture History*, New York 1959, p. 93.
- ³¹ See: O. Temple, ed. C. L. Temple, *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria*, reprinted London 1965, pp. 287-94; C. K. Meek, *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*, 2 vols, London 1931, Vol. I, pp. 446-531.
- ³² Barth, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 217; Denham, op. cit., p. 54.
- ³³ For Cameroun ground looms, see, for example: R. Gardi, *Unter afrikanischen Handwerkern*, Bern 1969, pp. 188-93; F. Thorbecke, *Im Hochland von Mittel-Kamerun*, 3 vols, Hamburg 1914-19, Vol. III, pp. 34-8.
- ³⁴ For one of the very few illustrations of the *langtang* Mumuye loom to have been published (a photograph by Dr A. Rubin), see: Eicher, *Nigerian Handcrafted Textiles*, p. 44.
- ³⁵ See: A. Hingston Quiggin, *A Survey of Primitive Money. The Beginnings of Currency*, London 1949, p. 85.



206 Shekarau Angyu, Aku Uka Kuuyo II, the Aku of the Jukun, flanked by two senior Elders of the Abachiu. Wukari, 1979. The Aku is wearing one of the royal kyadze cloths.

The Jukun, the Tiv and the Angas

The Jukun, the Tiv and the Angas occupy an arc of territory running from the Pankshin region of Plateau State through Benue and Gongola States to the edge of the Cameroun Highlands. From a technical point of view all three groups use looms which are related to the basic Hausa type, though both the Jukun and the Tiv looms have features which are not found in Hausaland. The Tiv beater, for example, shows certain elements which suggest Chadic influence; and the Jukun use supplementary heddles and a method of shed opening for which there are no Hausa parallels. The Angas, as one might expect from their geographical position close to the Hausa heartland, use the most Hausa-like weaving equipment. All three groups, however, weave cloths which are quite distinct from the Hausa repertoire.

The Jukun are concentrated in southern Adamawa with their capital at Wukari which, today, is just inside Gongola State near its border with Benue State. The Tiv are spread out along the southern side of the Benue below Makurdi and Ibi with their main centre at Gboko in Benue State. They are to be found north of the Benue, in the Shendam area for example; they live beside the Jukun in Wukari and there are Tiv living at Takum in Gongola State almost on the Cameroun border, and, indeed, there are Tiv across the international frontier. Their continued use of a traditional form of roof in which poles protrude at the apex like short horns makes it particularly easy to note the presence of a Tiv community even when passing through it at speed on one of Nigeria's superb new roads. The Angas occupy a region around Pankshin in Plateau State on the southern side of the Plateau which here marks a border of sorts between them and territory into which the Tiv have moved.

The Jukun

Some of the most complex of weft inlay decorated narrow strip cloth to be found in Nigeria is woven by the Jukun; and cloths would seem to play an important part in Jukun ceremonial. The history of the Jukun is of great interest. According to their own traditions, which are confirmed to some extent by such sources as the Kano Chronicle, the modern Jukun are the descendants of a people known as the Kororofawa who came from somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula to settle near Lake Chad, where they founded the city of Kukawa, later to be the Kanuri capital. In the fourteenth century the Kororofawa were the object of campaigns by the rulers of Kano, a city which they attacked in the sixteenth century and again in the seventeenth century when they nearly captured it. At one time the Kororofawa controlled one of the largest states in Nigeria, extending from the borders of Hausaland to the Cross River. Given these facts, it is not surprising that these people should have had a long history of contact with both Hausa and Kanuri.¹

According to Meek, whose book *A Sudanese Kingdom* remains the major work in English on the Jukun (or Kororofawa), weaving and dyeing were brought to the present centre of the Jukun world by the Abakwariga, a non-Muslim Hausa-speaking group; but, on the basis of our study of the typology of Jukun cloth we find this unlikely. While the Jukun loom has certain parallels with the looms of Hausaland, yet the cloth woven on it is something quite different. If parallels must be sought, they should be looked for among the Djerma of Niger. It is possible that Meek confused dyeing with weaving. Apart from the weft inlay Jukun designs, Wukari produces large quantities



207 The Jukun weaving town of Akwana, near Wukari. The looms are situated inside the huts, and here only the tell-tale drag-rod is to be seen.

of plain white strip which is dyed blue with white resist designs applied by the technique which, to use the term of Indonesian origin, is usually known as *tritik*, one of the family of methods to yield patterning by resist dyeing. The resultant cloth is not only used by the Jukun but also is exported to Bamenda in Cameroun where it has acquired such importance that it is often known as 'Bamenda cloth'. The dyeing of this cloth is today carried on by families who, while they now consider themselves Jukun, acknowledge Abakwariga descent.²

Whatever its origins, Jukun weaving had acquired a considerable reputation by the middle of the nineteenth century. Barth, on the basis of hearsay, reported thus:³

The people of Korórofa . . . are distinguished by their dark complexion, and features not disfigured by shasháwa or tattooing, by their long hair and their neat shirts, or rather plaids, *zénne*, which they wrap round the body. Indeed the inhabitants of Korórofa are celebrated all over this part of Africa for their cotton cloth, which is said to be of very fine texture, but also very narrow, being only the breadth of two fingers.

Certainly, today Jukun cloth is not quite so narrow; but it may well have been narrower, unless Barth was being confused by the *bullam* strip from Adamawa adjacent to Jukun country. Barth is correct, however,

about the Jukun cloth being worn like a 'plaid'. On formal occasions the Jukun still wear cloth in a toga-like manner such as we have noted with the Yoruba and which is the practice among the Ewe and Asante of Ghana. The Jukun, in a way, mark a major boundary point in the distribution of African dress between, on one hand, the gowns of the Hausa and those that they have influenced and, on the other hand, the toga-like cloths so common throughout the coastal and forest regions of West Africa.

Today there are a few traditional weavers in Wukari, the modern Jukun capital; but the major Jukun weaving centre is Akwana, some twenty-five miles to the west of Wukari. While on a rather small scale, yet Akwana is in fact a weaving town which reminded us of the Asante weaving town in Ghana, Bonwire, which arose from the need for cloth on the part of the Asante Court. The Chief of Akwana is also the chief weaver. Weaving in Akwana dates back to long before the founding of Wukari early in the nineteenth century.⁴ In the middle of the nineteenth century Akwana is mentioned by Barth, who called it Kwana (or Konawa in Hausa). Its cloth was of sufficient interest that Barth arranged through the Shehu of Borno's chief minister to obtain a specimen to send back to England for the edification of 'those who feel real concern for the state of industry among the native Africans'.⁵ We have failed to find any trace of this item in British collections: perhaps it was never, in fact, sent. Today, however, the cloth industry of Akwana



208 *Detail of a Jukun loom inside a hut in Akwana.*

has much diminished. According to the Chief, there were in 1979 about ten weavers actually working in Akwana: a few decades ago there were as many as fifty. Indeed, the Chief of Akwana reckoned that there could not be more than about thirty weavers throughout the country of the Jukun. The main concern of Jukun weavers now is the production of the traditional toga-like cloth, worn by both men and women, and called *kyadze*. These cloths, with their rich weft inlay designs, are worn on important Jukun occasions and form part of the regalia of the head of the Jukun, the Aku.

Meek illustrates a Jukun loom.⁶ Unfortunately, it rather looks as if the apparatus he photographed was specially set up for him and was not typical. Meek's photographs show a loom with a frame of sorts. The Jukun looms that we saw, and which represented a fair proportion of those surviving today, possessed no true frame. The essentials were two low forked uprights to support the warp beam, which was made from raffia palm, and two pegs to hold ropes to locate the breast beam. The weaver sat on the ground. The heddles and beater were attached to a single cord which was fixed to a point in a wall (or tree, if in the open) behind the weaver's head. The heddles were worked by means of toe grips made from discs of calabash (Meek's photographs, on the other hand, show short pedals). The beater was of essentially Hausa type, with leather-bound bowl and top. We saw no pulley: in all the Jukun looms which we encountered the heddles

moved up and down with the help of a rocker, again in the Hausa manner.

Indeed, apart from the toe grips, the general arrangement of the Jukun loom as so far described was very similar to the Hausa looms we saw in Zaria. The Jukun loom, however, on the basis of our fieldwork, possesses two main features which distinguish it from others. First, it is provided with supplementary heddles, no more than loose loops of thick thread through which the warp passes just before the warp beam. These are threaded up to make the sheds called for by the complex Jukun weft inlay designs. Second, the Jukun weaver, in order to keep open the sheds made by these extra heddles, uses a strange sword consisting of a curved segment of calabash. Both the extra heddles and the calabash sword are visible in Meek's photographs.

An interesting feature of the Jukun looms which we saw was the system of drag weights. The warp bundle was very carefully wrapped in paper to protect it from dust, and then mounted on a very heavy weight of one or two large stones carried on a specially woven mat about two inches thick and made from a coil of palm matting strip. Most Jukun weavers worked in very dark sheds from which the warp and drag weight protruded rather like some exotic insect tethered to an invisible post. It was extremely difficult to take photographs inside a Jukun weaving hut, even with flash, not least because of the very large numbers of people who tended to congregate in what was a rather



209 and 210 A Jukun weaver working outdoors in Wukari. The calabash sword stick can be clearly seen holding open the shed for the inlay weave. Note the two extra string heddles strung between the sword and the warp beam.



confined space. This fact, no doubt, explains why Meek had to improvise a loom in the open air for his own photographs.

The following are some Jukun weaving terms which we collected:⁷

atuapa—cloth
jojo—weaving
akwanda wa jojo—weaver
ambofor—cotton
pii—spinning
afyon—heddles
asepo—beater
akofyu—shuttle
agbokusa—calabash sword

The Jukun *kyadze* cloth depends for its effect upon the use of supplementary weft inlay put in by means of hand picking and the sheds provided by the extra heddles and the calabash sword.⁸ The patterns so made are reversible, that is to say they appear in the same form on both sides of the cloth, in contrast to Yoruba weft inlay practice which tends to produce a pattern seen on one side only. Traditional hand spun cotton, white and indigo dyed, has been supplemented by machine spun yarns and chemical colours; but the

dominant pattern effect comes from black or dark blue inlay on a white warp background strip between four and five inches wide (but older cloths had a warp as narrow as three inches). The Jukun patterning is particularly interesting in that, while executed by weft inlay, the over all effect is that of overshot weaving, that is to say of patterns which have been threaded up on the warp. The parallel, here, could be with the weaving of the Manjaca and the Papel in Guinea-Bissau; but patterning of this general effect can be found nearer to hand among the Djerma in Niger.

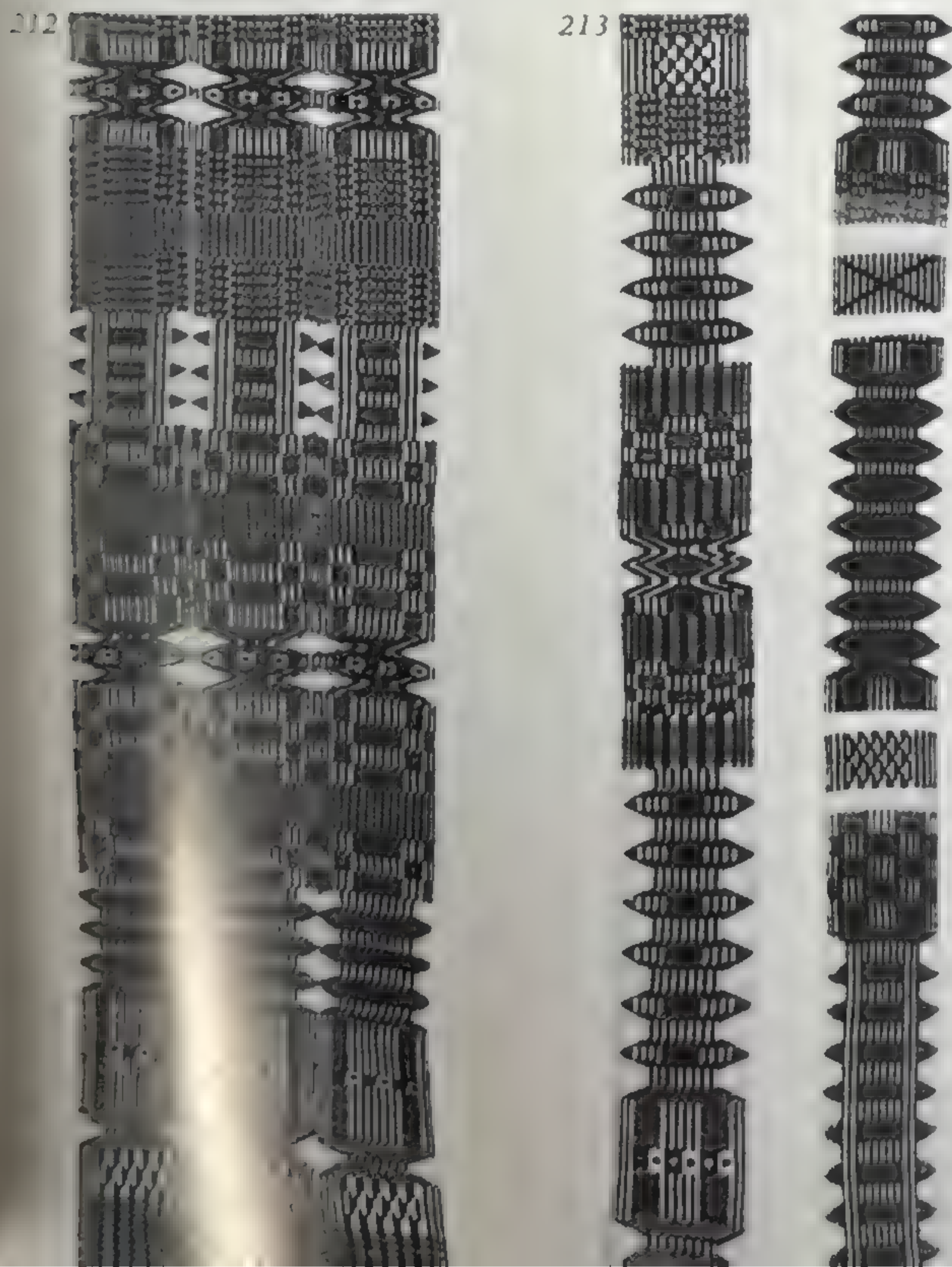
The designs used in Jukun *kyadze* cloth are so unlike anything produced by other groups in Nigeria that their origin must remain something of a mystery. If indeed, the Jukun did move to their present location from the north, then they may well at one time have shared a common tradition with the Djerma of Niger. This would certainly explain the parallels which undoubtedly do exist between Jukun *kyadze* and the type of Djerma cloth known as *tera-tera*. The uniqueness of Jukun cloth in Nigeria no doubt explains its failure to be recognized by some nineteenth century travellers. Perhaps the first Jukun cloth to reach Europe after that ordered to be sent by Barth (which might, in fact, never have been sent at all) was that



211 A fine Jukun kyadze cloth can be seen showing the dense distribution of Jukun inlay designs. The chair in the foreground is characteristic of both the Jukun and the Tiv. C. K. Meek, 1931.

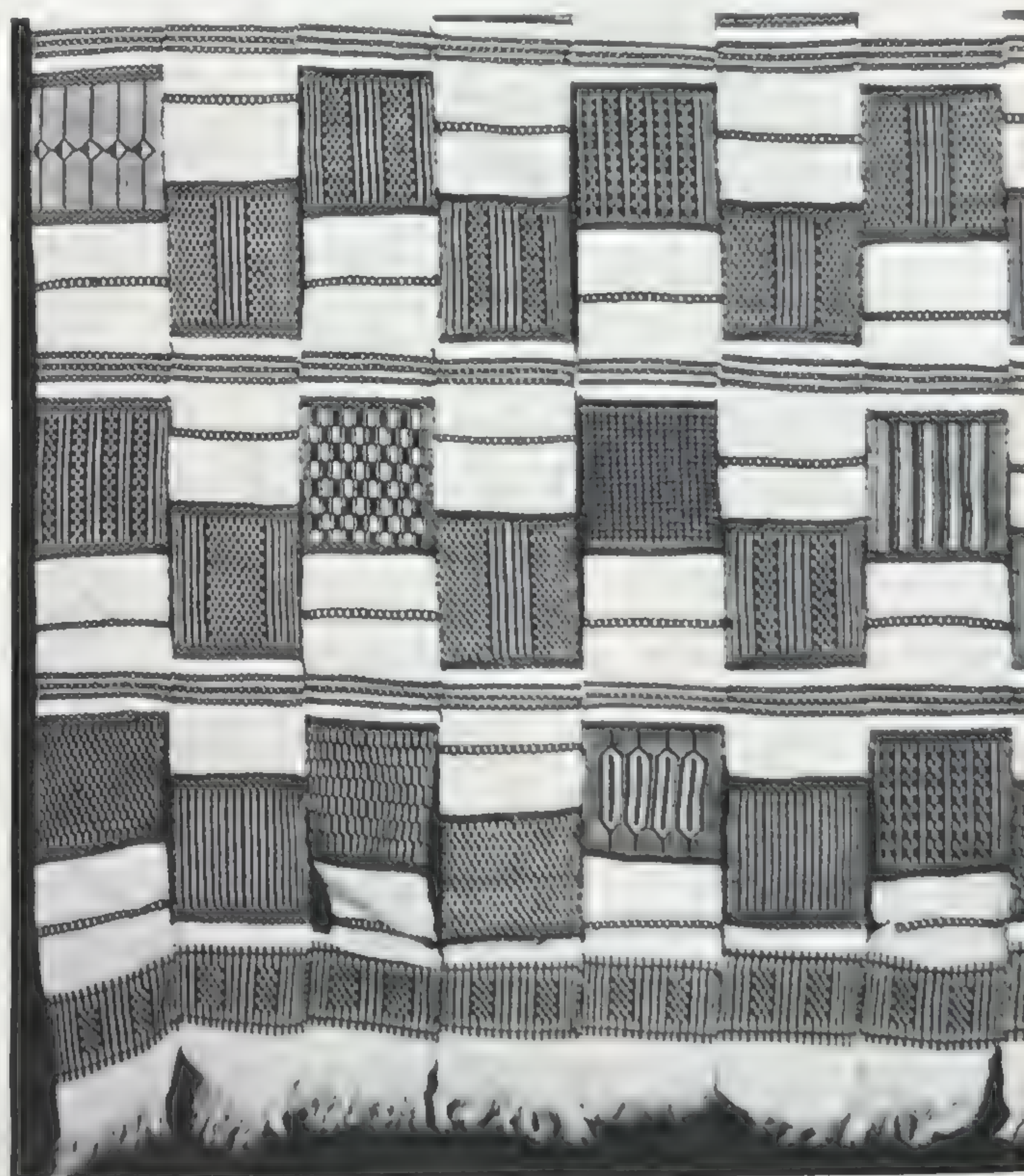
provided for the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde by Nachtigal. Unfortunately, this item has been ascribed, incorrectly, to Ilorin.⁹

212 and 213 Examples of typical Jukun intricate inlay designs, which extend over the whole ground weave.



214 and 215 Older samples of Jukun weaving collected in 1917. Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.

216 Compare these Djerma inlay patterns from Niger with those of the Jukun. A striking similarity is apparent.





217 Jukun *akya* cloth being prepared in Wukari. The outline of the pattern is first drawn on to the cloth (218), and the raffia painstakingly sewn into position before dyeing takes place.



218

Akya cloths

Apart from the distinctive *kyadze* cloths, the Jukun region around Wukari produces another, equally distinctive, cloth type known as *akya*. *Akya* cloths can be used for male and female garments of the toga or wrapper type; but they can also occur in very large sizes, up to six yards long. The strip may be as wide as five to six inches or it may be as narrow as two inches. The yarn is hand spun cotton and the weave is loose. The distinguishing feature of *akya* cloths is their complex decoration by a tie-dye technique in indigo.

There are a few families making *akya* cloth in one quarter of Wukari. The bulk of its production appears to take place in villages between Wukari and the Cameroun border including Takum and Baissa. The main Jukun role, at least in Wukari, was the sewing together of the strips, the sewing up for tie-dyeing and the actual dyeing. The actual strips were drawn in from a large catchment area and were probably made by many groups in northeastern Nigeria including migrant Hausa. The Jukun weavers using the classic Jukun loom described above were certainly not working on anything so humble as the basic strip for *akya* cloth. The *akya* cloth workers in Wukari, while declaring themselves Jukun now, admitted to descent

from Abakwariga migrants, Hausa-speaking non-Muslims.

The strip for *akya*, which is either plain white or white with the occasional very thin red or blue warp stripe, is first sewn by hand, selvedge to selvedge, into a cloth. Patterns are then outlined in a brown pigment on the sewn cloth; and along these lines strands of raffia are sewn to create the resist barrier. When the cloth is soaked in the dye pot the raffia-covered lines remain white while the background turns indigo blue. After dyeing and drying in the sun, the raffia is unpicked (but often leaving the odd thread behind) to reveal the design. The process of preparation of *akya* cloth is time consuming: a cloth with an elaborate design could well take weeks to sew up with raffia, and it would be expensive. The designs used in *akya* cloths consist basically of circular motifs set out in a kind of border. The patterns are usually abstract; but *akya* cloths may contain quite elaborate representations of reptiles, birds and animals. The technique involved in *akya* cloth preparation, *tritik*, is closely related to *plangi* (the creation of circles by a resist process usually involving the sewing into the cloth before dyeing of pebbles or other such objects) and *ikat* (which is resist



217 Jukun akya cloth being prepared in Wukari. The outline of the pattern is first drawn on to the cloth (218), and the raffia painstakingly sewn into position before dyeing takes place.



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dyeing applied to bundles of warp threads before weaving). The processes are widely used in other parts of Nigeria for cloth woven not only on the man's horizontal and the woman's vertical loom but also factory broadcloth. It is reasonable to suppose that the use of such a technique in the country of the Jukun has some connection with its use in regions to the west of the Jukun.

Just as the Hausa *turkudi* has its main market outside Nigeria in the Sahara, so the main market for the *akya* cloths lies in Cameroun.¹⁰ Again, like the *turkudi* trade, the commerce in *akya* is of great antiquity. Not only in the Bamenda Grasslands but in many other parts of Cameroun this cloth has acquired traditional value as clothing, as burial shrouds and as material for a multitude of ritual purposes.¹¹ The cloth is often described as a product of Cameroun; and there may well be people in Cameroun today who make it. Traditionally, however, it comes from the sphere of the Jukun. *Akya* cloths are often called Bamenda cloths after one of the major markets for their distribution in Cameroun, where they are also known as *doma* cloths.



219



220

220 An old type Jukun nyikpo coat belonging to the Aku of Wukari, now considered too old and fragile for use; sewn from narrow strip cloth. The nyikpo coat is worn in association with rain-making rituals, by the Aku of the Jukun.

219 A Jukun nyikpo coat collected in 1932 from the Wukari region. Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.

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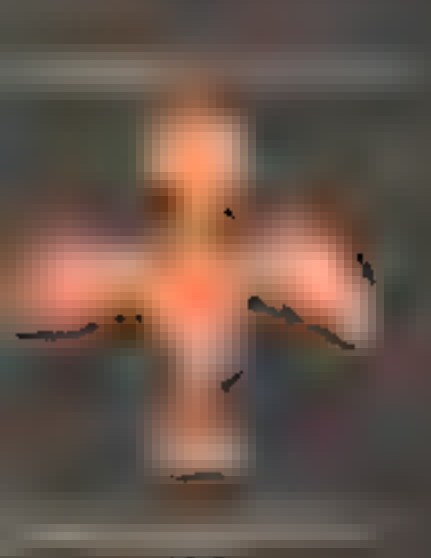
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220

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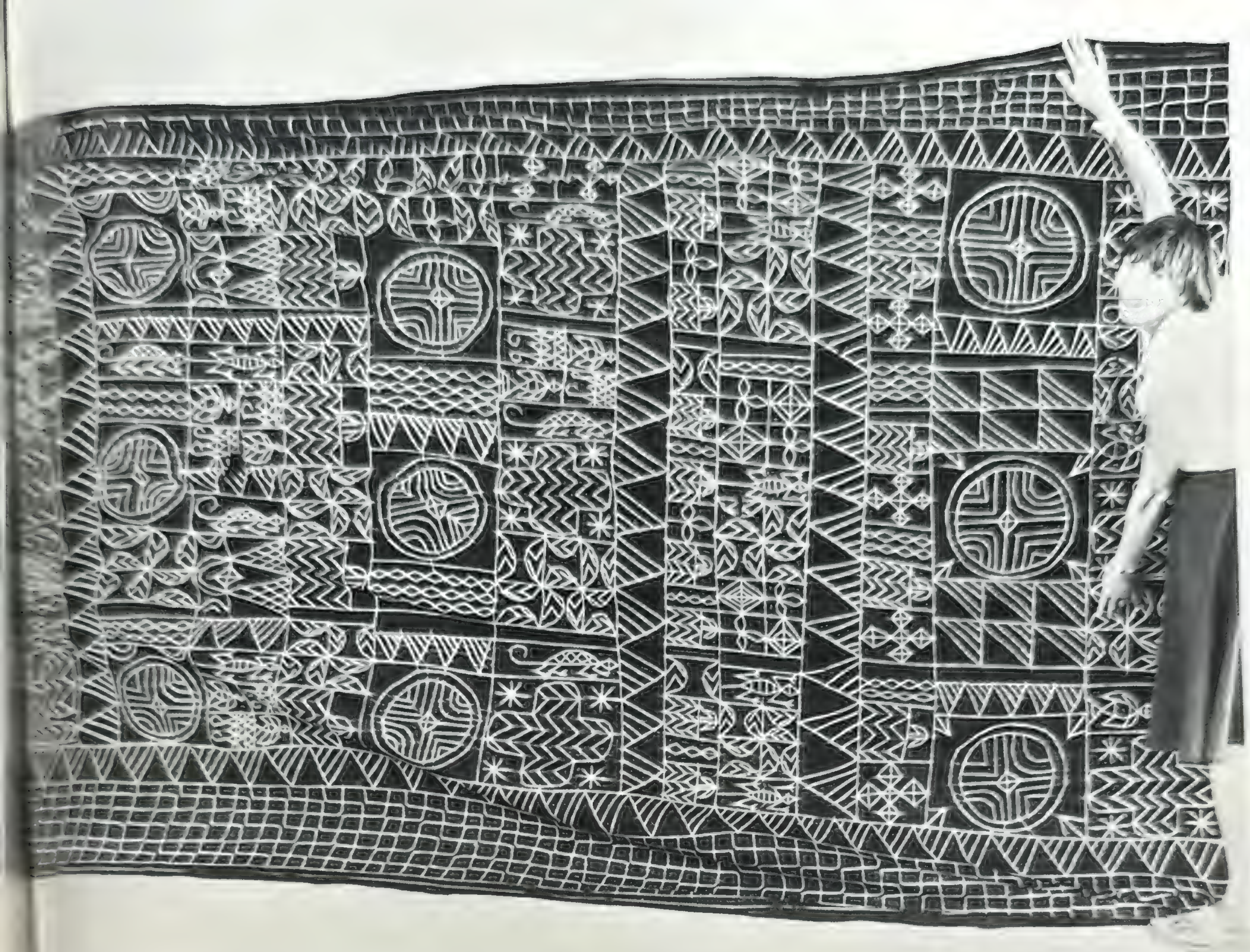
219 A Jukun nyikpo coat collected in 1932 from the Wukari region. Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.



221 One of the royal Jukun akyo jo cloths among the Court regalia of the Aku of Wukari. These extremely large cloths are worn by the Court Elders at important functions.

222 An interesting old Jukun kyadze cloth woven with magenta red wefts and including figurative motifs of lizards. Beving collection 1934. British Museum, London.





223 *An extremely large akya cloth belonging to the Court regalia at Wukari, and worn by the Aku on special occasions.*

A number of mid-nineteenth century travellers in Nigeria report that people living near the Jukun were in the habit of paying tribute to Wukari in the form of cloth.¹² It is possible that such cloth often took the form of plain strip suitable for the *akya* industry, and constituted a major source of material for those families engaged in this craft.

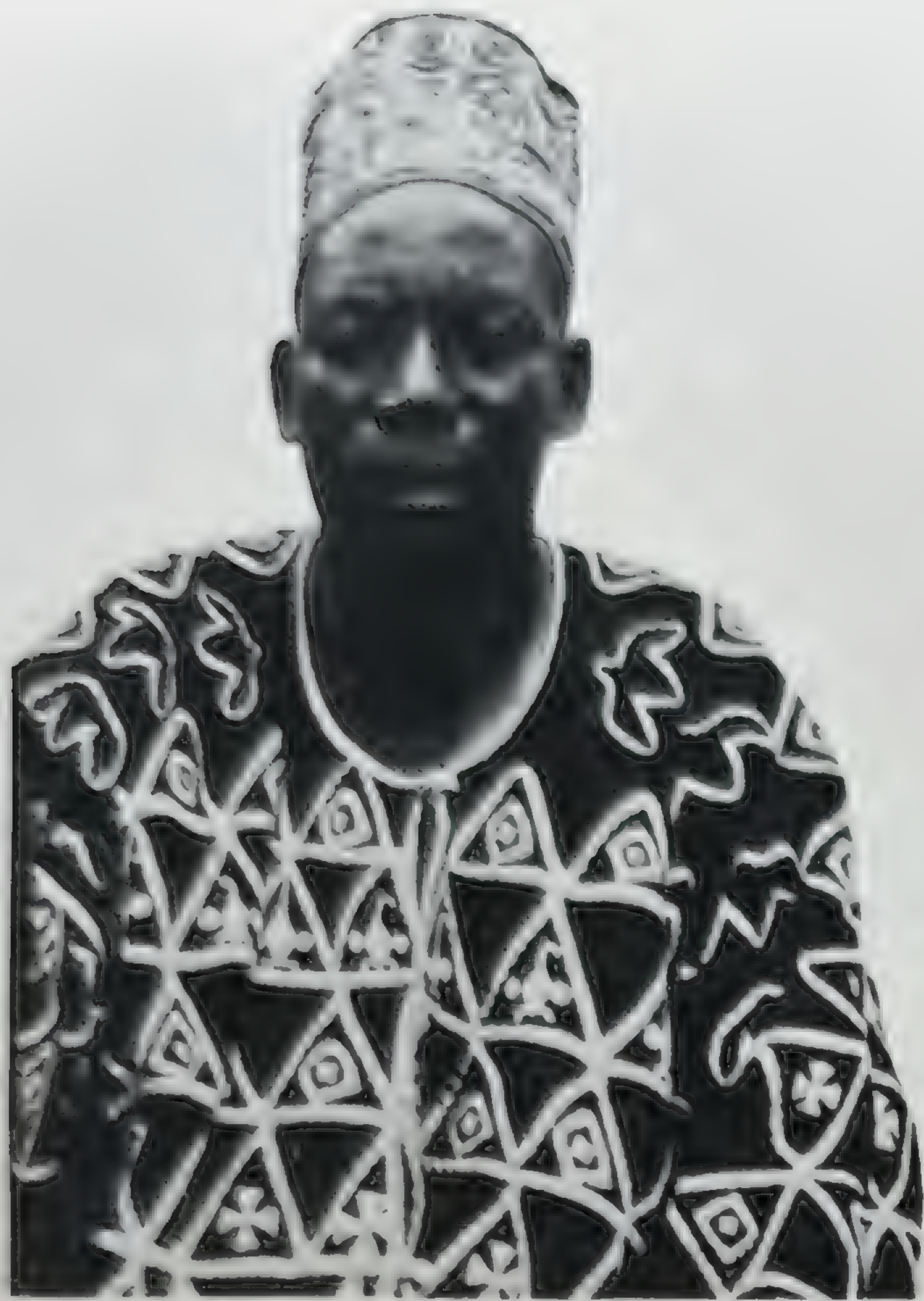
Jukun ceremonial dress

We were extraordinarily fortunate, while in Wukari in 1979, to be able to meet the Aku, Mallam Shekarau Angyu, Aku Uka Kuuyu II, who not only talked with us and answered our questions, but also showed us and allowed us to photograph some of his own cloths

and robes. The Aku's Council of Elders was also extremely helpful. As a result we were not only able to check Meek's observations on Jukun dress but to see for ourselves some magnificent examples of the art of traditional Nigerian textile craftsmen.

There were four main categories of Jukun royal cloth. First, there were the *nyikpo* coats; second, the *akyo jo* cloths; third, the *akya* cloths; and fourth, the *kyadze* cloths.

The *nyikpo* coats are, in terms of Jukun ceremonial, the most important of these four categories. The Aku showed us two examples of this garment, one extremely old and very fragile, and the other newly made out of broadcloth. He assured us, however, that traditionally these garments should be made from



224 The late Aku of the Jukun, and father of the present Aku, wearing his royal nyikpo coat. C. K. Meek, 1931.

narrow strip cloth; and it is interesting that the two examples which Meek collected, which he presented to the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford in 1922, and where they are still to be found, are indeed of narrow strip cloth. The term *nyikpo* appears to cover two quite distinct garments, one a fairly long gown with sleeves, and the other a kind of cape, or poncho, of either rectangular or triangular shape. According to our Jukun informants these *nyikpo* garments are traditionally associated with the process of rain-making in elaborate rituals called for in times of drought.

The coat which we saw in Wukari, if we ignore its broadcloth background (which was admittedly untraditional), and the specimen in Oxford, are very similar. The Wukari example was made for the present Aku's installation; and Meek's coat certainly came from the most traditional of sources. The decoration on the background (strip in Oxford) is of appliqué, consisting of an array of rows of red triangles edged in white and containing white symbols. The Oxford specimen has three circles, each with a central dot, in each triangle. The Wukari specimen has a greater variety of symbols: a group of three circles, a triangle, a star, a lozenge with a vertical line, a scorpion, a star and crescent, a single circle, three triangles with their apices touching. The Wukari specimen also has

shoulder panels, absent in the Oxford specimen, which include bird motifs. Both coats have a fringe at the bottom. Both are open right down the front and have a rear split. The front is closed in both cases by tie strings. In shape these garments recall the coat worn by the Shehu of Borno in the photograph published by Olive MacLeod in 1912, to which reference has already been made. The prototype, in other words, could be some kind of riding garment from the Arab Islamic world, which is just what one would expect from the Jukun's own view of their origins.

The Wukari cape, very old and of narrow strip, differs somewhat from that collected by Meek and now in Oxford. The Wukari example is rectangular, split longitudinally at either end and, it would seem, originally provided with a central split for the head, now sewn up. The background is very dark blue three-inch narrow strip; and the decoration is rows of appliqué triangles bordered in white. The Oxford cape is rather more elaborate in shape. In plan a square, when worn it would become two triangles, one down the front and the other down the back, the points elongated by downward pointing strips. It is decorated in appliqué with an outline white grid, each square containing a motif of a square within a square but set at forty-five degrees to the axes of the grid. The background is dark blue strip cloth. The garment is lined with plain white except for the two extension strips which contain some coarse indigo and brown in



225 A Jukun nyikpo cape collected by C. K. Meek in 1922. Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.



226 A new nyikpo coat, especially made for the present Aku of the Jukun. Wukari, 1979

their section of lining. Thomas Hutchinson, in the middle of the nineteenth century, observed just such a cape on the north bank of the Benue opposite Wukari where he reported a 'Chief . . . dressed in a tobe of triangular pieces of white and black cloth, trimmed with red'.¹³ These *nyikpo* garments are worn by the Aku for a variety of important ceremonial and religious functions; and they clearly take pride of place in the Aku's official wardrobe.

The second category, the *akyo jo* cloths, are worn by the assembly of Jukun Elders, the *Abachu*, on such formal occasions as the installation of an Aku. In purely aesthetic terms, this category must include some of the most dramatic cloths we have seen anywhere in West Africa. We saw two specimens in the Aku's Palace in Wukari. They were huge, over five yards long and two yards wide. Intended to be worn as waist cloths, they must have been enormously impressive in use. The main feature of these cloths was the use of appliqué on a very dark blue narrow strip background. The arrangement of the patterns in each cloth was the same, though the motifs differed, the pattern block being more or less E-shaped, with a

border of pattern at each end carried along the bottom side, from the centre of which a thick block of pattern protruded upwards. In one of the Aku's *akyo jo* cloths the dominant motifs were birds, tortoises and swastikas of both the Teutonic and the Asiatic variety, that is to say with their extremities pointing both to the right and to the left. The other *akyo jo* cloth had a similar arrangement but with only one motif, that of a bird in flight, which, the Aku told us, was a symbol for progress and prosperity.

The third category of important Jukun cloth we have already encountered: it is the *akya*, in its humbler forms destined for export to Cameroun. Among the cloth which we saw in the Aku's Palace in Wukari was an *akya* cloth so magnificent that we found ourselves speechless in its presence. With a design based on geometric shapes, including the triangles which we have seen before on the *nyikpo* coats and capes, it also contains representations of birds and lizards. Words cannot describe the sheer size, let alone the subtle complexity of patterning of this textile. The Aku was clearly, and deservedly, proud of this cloth. He went to some trouble to explain to us the significance of the



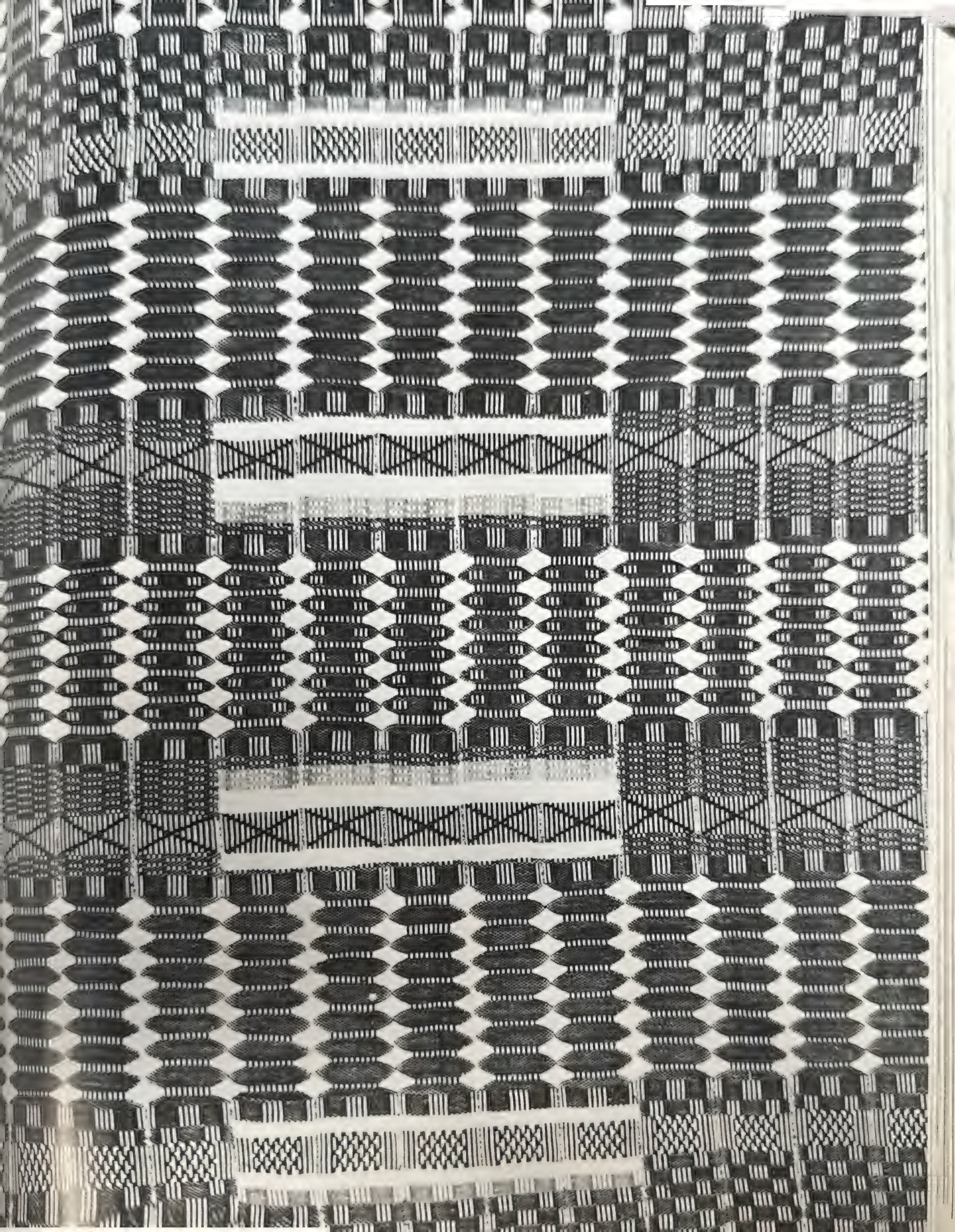
227 The royal Jukun cloth bearer, here carrying two important kyadze cloths for the Aku. Wukari, 1979.

creatures figured on it and on the *akyo jo* cloths already discussed. The lizard, he said, symbolized the welcome that the Jukun extend to all, the friendly creature that lives in houses great and small. The chameleon represented the Jukun attitude towards progress, gradual change taken slowly and carefully in the best interests of the people. The scorpion, which was figured on one of the *nyikpo* garments, indicated the latent power of the Jukun: 'when the Jukun touch you, you feel it', were the Aku's words. The circular motif was the sun, another symbol of Jukun power. Yet another represented the stars, and showed that the Jukun were guided by the lights in the heavens and used the information they provided for predicting what was to happen in the year ahead, particularly in respect to harvests.

The ritual importance of *akya* cloths for the Jukun is indicated by such a cloth which Meek collected and which is now in the Pitt-Rivers Museum of the University of Oxford. It forms part of a masquerade costume, said to represent the spirit of the Jukun deity Ashana. The use of *akya* cloth for such masquerade purposes is repeated in many parts of Cameroun; and, since the *akya* cloth derives from the land of the Jukun, it may well be that such practices in Cameroun were inspired in the first instance by the example of the Jukun who, after all, were once the rulers of a great empire and worthy of emulation.

The fourth cloth category represented in the collection in the Aku's Palace in Wukari is *kyadze*, the weft-inlay decorated material which has already been noted. The Aku showed us two examples of this cloth. They were full sized men's cloths, one with twenty strips and the other with fifteen. They were produced folded in a special way and carried by one of the Aku's retainers who had great familiarity with these cloths. In one of them the Aku, towards the end of our interview, allowed us to photograph him. The chief weaver at Akwana told us that these cloths were very important to the Jukun; and he said that certain variations in pattern were reserved for the exclusive use of the Aku, and others for Jukun persons of high status. The Aku, he told us, was by tradition buried in an *akya* cloth. Other Jukun, however, used *kyadze* cloths for their shrouds. At the annual gatherings of the Jukun the wearing of *kyadze* was regarded as being sartorially correct.

228 Detail of a royal Jukun kyadze cloth, Wukari, 1979. The ground is white and the inlay woven in indigo blue cotton.



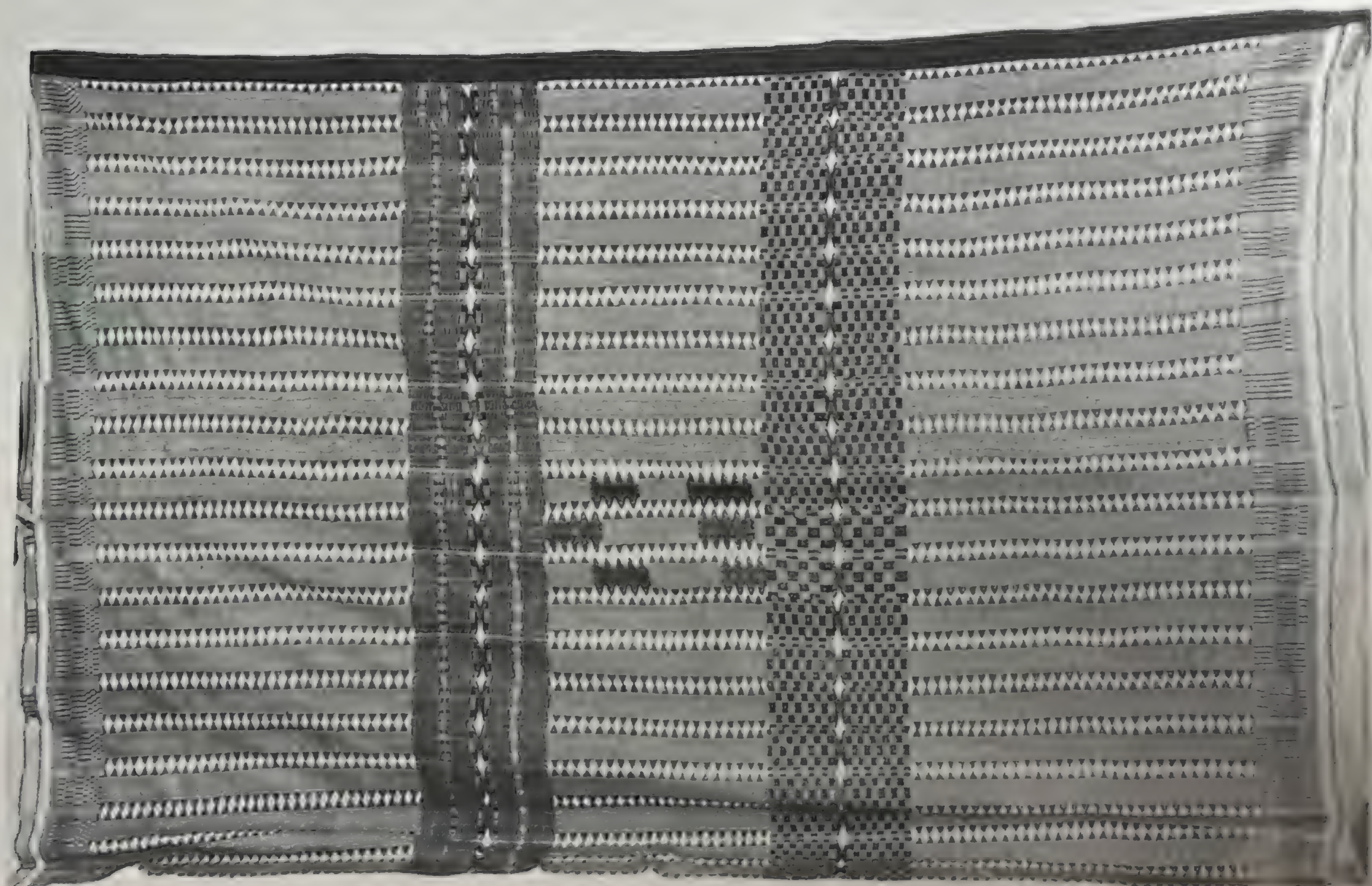


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Meek reports on Jukun funerary practice.¹⁴ He describes the winding of the body of the deceased in the ancient Egyptian manner, as we have already noted do the Fali in Cameroun. A similar practice is recorded for the Nkum, an Idoma-speaking people who live in the region of Ogoja (just in Cross River State) not too far from the present Jukun heartland. As we have already observed in other contexts, it may well be that in the last analysis the survival of Jukun weaving will depend, in the face of competition from the factory-made cloths of cotton and synthetics, on the importance that the product of the traditional narrow strip horizontal loom has in this last of all rites of passage.

229 Costume of the Jukun impersonator of the Ashana Spirit. Akya cloth and kyadze strips (in topknot) have been combined. C. K. Meek 1922. Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford

230 A royal Jukun kyadze cloth. No space is left unembellished with inlay. Wukari, 1979.





231 *Tiv loom situated north of the Benue, at Jarmany, near Yelwa*

The Tiv

The Tiv, sometimes referred to in the literature as the Munshi or Mitshi (probably derived via Hausa from the Jukun term *Mbitse*), are close neighbours of the Jukun.¹⁶ In Wukari, for example, Jukun and Tiv live side by side. The major Tiv town is Gboko, in Benue State. The Tiv have enjoyed a reputation as weavers, and many European museums contain samples of cloth made by the Tiv. However, it is clear that even in the 1930s the craft was on the wane among these people. In 1979 we experienced considerable difficulty in finding any Tiv weavers at all. We were able, in the end, to study two Tiv weaving communities, one at the village of Jarmany near the north bank of the Benue on the Jos-Wukari road, and the other in a village not far from Gboko. These two used equipment which differed in some respects; and they were producing rather different cloth. They may, however, be considered between them to represent a cross section of sorts of modern Tiv weaving. In the case of the Tiv weavers near Gboko we were able to discuss photographs of so-called Tiv cloths in the Museum of Mankind and the Liverpool Museum collected many decades ago; and we were, moreover, able to commission replicas of

some of these cloths as a practical check that they really were Tiv. We also, in our transit of country occupied by the Tiv, checked at a large number of markets and observed Tiv cloth in use. The sum total of this research suffices to enable us to make some meaningful observations on Tiv weaving today.

There seemed to be at least two distinct groups of Tiv weavers. Those on the north bank of the Benue appeared to have been influenced by the same kind of Nupe influences we have already noted in Keffi; and, no doubt, they were supplying the same kind of market. The main village which we identified for weavers of this type was Jarmany about forty miles south of Shendam; and here we will for convenience refer to this group as the Jarmany group. The weavers near Gboko were far less subject to external influences. Our main informant here, a man of considerable age, was weaving cloths which were purely Tiv and for which we could not find close parallels among other Nigerian weavers. We will call this the Gboko group.¹⁷

While clearly of the same family, there were significant differences between the Jarmany and Gboko looms. Both were without frames, and therefore nearer to the Jukun or Hausa pattern than to the Chadic looms of the Waja and Kanuri. The Jarmany

232 *Tiv loom working south of the Benue, in Gboko region*



loom, however, used a beater which certainly belonged to the Chadid family, while the Gboko beater was, if anything, rather like that used by the Yoruba. The common feature of both beaters, however, was that they floated on the warp; in other words, that they were not supported from above by any arrangement of suspension cords. This is something quite unique in our experience of Nigerian weaving: indeed, for parallels in West Africa one would probably have to go to the border regions of Sierra Leone, Guinea-Conakry and Liberia where floating beaters are a feature of a strange family of looms best known in the form of the Mende tripod loom. Despite this common arrangement, the shape of the Jarmany and Gboko beaters differed fundamentally. The Jarmany beater looked very much like a flattened version of the characteristic Chadid beater, with a large curved bowl, but thin rather than thick and lighter rather than heavy; and its side members were rods of Chadid form but fixed by pegs rather than bindings made of leather. The Gboko beater was rectangular, almost square in fact, with top, bottom and sides of wood of more or less the same dimensions, the whole bound together in the Yoruba manner though, here, the binding material was copper wire rather than cotton cord.

Both looms had the same kind of warp beam, supported by two uprights each ending in a fork. The breast beams differed both in mounting and in position. The Jarmany breast beam was held in place by two short uprights each provided with a hooked top; and the beam was located over the weaver's lap. The Gboko breast beam was located very close to the ground by two pegs which, being fixed so that they leaned away from the warp beam, served the same function as the hooks in Jarmany. This low mounting was dictated by the fact that the Gboko breast beam was placed below the weaver's knees in the manner of the Hausa *turkudi* loom.

The Jarmany loom had heddles worked by toe grips of calabash rather in the Jukun manner. The Gboko loom had heddles worked by side pedals which were kept in position by cords running back to the pegs which located the breast beam, an arrangement strongly evocative of Hausa practice. The Jarmany heddles were connected by a cord running over a pulley of rather strange form, the wheel being essentially a rather wide rod with a deep central groove and the frame a triangle of cloth-bound wire. Wheel, in fact, is a misnomer here because the rod did not actually rotate; the cords connecting the heddles

234 Detail of Tiv loom at Jarmany. Contrast interesting hook-like tops to breast beam uprights, toggle-like pulley, heavier type wooden floating beater, and toe disc pedals

233 Tiv with loom which has rocker bar, long pedals, no breast beam hooks, and a light floating beater, with the weaver sitting on the ground with his legs over the breast beam. Gboko region.



just slid over what amounted to a fixed bar providing no friction-relieving device. This arrangement was not encountered by us anywhere else in Nigeria, though we know parallels for it in other parts of West Africa, in the Ivory Coast for example. The Gboko heddles were linked by a rocker. In both the Jarmany and the Gboko looms the heddles were supported by a single cord (there being no need to support the beater); but while the Jarmany cord ran back to a fixing point in the hut wall behind the weaver's head at an angle of about forty-five degrees, the Gboko heddle support



The Jukun, the Tiv and the Angas

as to its ancestry in the beater. To speculate further would be to go beyond the scope of this book.

The following are some Tiv names for loom parts, mainly gleaned in the Gboko region:

- chiffi*—beater
- atuba*—heddles
- itashe*—pulley (in the Jarmany loom)
- yohol ngegh*—rocker (in the Gboko loom)
- angahal*—pedals (in the Gboko loom)
- akusha*—shuttle
- tso*—(canoe) sledge for drag weight

The Jarmany weavers were nearly all comparatively young men. They used warps of machine-spun cotton of widths from four and a half inches to seven inches. Their cloth seemed to be in good demand. Some they took themselves to markets as far afield as Shendam. The bulk of their output, however, was ordered by and sold to specialist dealers who called on the weavers at regular intervals. The repertoire of patterns was somewhat restricted; and two main types predominated. One pattern called *bwere* consisted of about fifteen warp stripes on a six inch web with dark red, dark blue, light blue, black and white; another, *kondu*, on a rather narrower web, had a red background with warp stripes of black edged with blue. The designs were very similar to those produced around Keffi, and, no doubt, they were destined for much the same market. While there were not very many weavers here, yet it was clear that their craft was economically viable and catered to a wide range of popular taste.

With the Gboko weavers the situation was quite different. Our main informant was an old man who farmed near the village of Ipiav not far from the outskirts of Gboko. This was a region of scattered farms on many of which weaving had taken place not so long ago if it did not actually take place today. The weavers were also farmers, often men of substance who did not need to exert themselves in this craft for their livelihood. The demand, not surprisingly, was for traditional cloths related to Tiv customs which could not be obtained in the market. Our informant had been a weaver all his life as had his father before him. He spun his own yarn, with help from his wife, warped up on the ground in the manner we have noted with the Yoruba, and wove under the eave of a traditional Tiv round house (he actually lived in a substantial rectangular house of cement block with a

ran, much nearer to the vertical, to a pole which was part of the hut roof, in the shade of which the weaver worked. The heddlles were wide, and their tops were reinforced with iron rod. The Jarmany loom had a drag weight of heavy stones carried on a sledge made from a section of oil drum. The Gboko loom, on the other hand, had a most interesting arrangement for tensioning the warp consisting of a pair of drag weights, each carried in a barge-like piece of hollowed wood, each holding warp of a different colour, the final length of each warp being coiled into a ring and tightly bound with cloth or paper.

Were it not for the use of the floating beater, it would be easy to place these looms in two distinct categories, with the Jarmany loom being related to that of the Jukun and the Gboko loom to that of the Hausa or Nupe. The presence of the floating beater, however, must here be taken as the diagnostic feature of the traditional Tiv loom. It was our impression, moreover, that the Jarmany beater form, with its Chadic undertones, was probably more traditional than the Gboko beater with its echoes of Yorubaland. Our analysis on the basis of our own observations (and the literature is of little help in this respect) would tend towards the conclusion that both in Jarmany and near Gboko we have descendants of a Chadic loom type which has lost most of its characteristic skeleton, and which has been subjected to hybridization by various external influences, but which has retained some clue



235 Tiv net-like blue cloth called ashisha, sixteen inches wide, collected before 1930. Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool

236 Recent white ashisha woven near Gboko. 1979
See footnote on page 165



237 Recent blue ashisha woven near Gboko. 1979

238 (below) Tiv net-like white ashisha cloth collected before 1930. Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool



corrugated iron roof). He wove shrouds, *akpem*, from time to time, and, if pressed, would make certain other traditional cloths. He and his wife were very interested in the subject of Tiv weaving; and they identified a number of cloths from our photographs of items in European museum collections.

According to this old weaver, Mr Hiimpke by name, there appeared to be two major categories of traditional Tiv cloth, on a technical analysis. The first was a type of cloth which was decorated with rows of holes or, even, blocks where the weft had been left out altogether. These were cloths of a type probably related to the net-like *bubu* cloths so admired by the Gbari. There are good examples of this genre of Tiv cloth both in the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford and in the Liverpool Museum. The dominant colours are dark blue to black or white, though yellow and red are also possible. These cloths are often garnished with sewn-on cowrie shells, bells of brass and the like. Mr Hiimpke actually made us two pieces of cloth of this kind, thus confirming their Tiv attribution.* The second category is a more orthodox narrow strip; in the case of cloth in Mr Hiimpke's repertoire decorated with two designs: one, *angel*, with two black warp stripes, and the other, *kungwa kpo*, consisting of a broad central black warp stripe, in both cases on a plain white background.

The cloth with holes, or bands of warp only, was given by Mr Hiimpke a number of names, *gbev wagh* and *ashisha* being two which he produced with the help of our museum photographs and his wife's memory. The major function of this cloth seemed to be as a kind of outer wrapper for women. The more orthodox strip was the basis of a large toga-like cloth worn by both men and women at Tiv ceremonies. It was, in other words, the Tiv equivalent of the Jukun *kyadze* cloth or the Yoruba *aso ibora*. There also exists evidence that the Tiv once used for ceremonial purposes aprons of black and white strip, in design rather like those of the Eloi to which reference has already been made.

From both conversation with Tiv weavers and research in museums outside Nigeria it is clear that the Tiv once possessed an elaborate repertoire of cloth types and designs. Abraham, in his study of the Tiv published in 1933, devotes some space to Tiv cloths.

* Recent observation of the use, by Tiv men, of a frame ground loom somewhat similar in technique to the raffia loom, explains the production of the wider Tiv *ashisha* cloths on page 164. This information came to our notice after this book went to press.



219 Recent Tiv black and white strips called *kungwa kpo* (right) and *angel* (left), woven near Ghale on the northern border of Nigeria.

220 The cloth being worn by a woman carrying a pot of beer on her back. C. H. Mann, 1925.





241 Tiv shroud cloths in the foreground, known as *akpem*, on sale in tight rolls in Onyagede market, near Abakpa

Abraham has a deservedly high reputation as a lexicographer; but as a student of cloth he certainly was not at his best. We endeavoured to work out Abraham's terminology with the help of Mr Hiimpke and other Tiv informants, but we all, at the end of the day, were as confused as when we began. Later writers on the Tiv, like L. and P. Bohannon, have tended to pass over the problem of Tiv cloth with little more than a discreet and bland paragraph.¹⁸ One problem, already faced by Abraham, is that traditional Tiv weaving is a dying art, indeed it must be very close to extinction. As Abraham put it: 'The Tiv weave a great number of different cloths, but these are fast being ousted by materials bought at the European canteens and the time cannot be far away when weaving will become a thing of the past.'¹⁹ These words were written before 1933: by 1979 it rather looked as if Abraham's prophecy was about to be fulfilled.

Mr Hiimpke rather implied that it was the demand for shrouds that kept the traditional Tiv weavers, using hand spun cotton, in business. These shrouds, *akpem*, could be seen on sale in most markets in the country of the Tiv. Tightly bundled up, of plain white strip, they were being sold by old men in a section of the market quite distinct from the main cloth section.

One other factor in the Tiv weaving situation is that for many traditional purposes it now seems that cloth woven by women on the upright loom has replaced that produced by men on the narrow horizontal loom. This whole question will be discussed in the second part of this book.

The Angas

As long ago as 1911 Morel published a reference to certain girth bands available in northern Nigeria. They were, he reported, called *magai* or *majayi* and 'made by the pagan tribes of Bauchi'.²⁰ We found during our fieldwork in 1978 many woven girth bands in northern markets. These varied in width from about two inches to about five inches. About five feet in length, and with iron rings attached at each end by means of leather tabs, these humble items of animal harness have a very characteristic system of patterning. In texture they look very much like the *masafi* *wundu* drawstrings already described in the chapter dealing with Hausaland. These *majayi* girths have a very much warp-dominated texture and a more or less standard decoration of a thick stripe of warp in the centre of the band, usually in yellow to brown but sometimes in blue. The most interesting feature of this design is that it was very similar, if not identical, to the design of certain strips preserved in museums in England which have been attributed to the Angas. Since some of the Angas indeed live on the Bauchi Plateau, there was a distinct possibility, therefore, that the Angas had woven the girths mentioned by Morel and found by us in Nigerian markets. This was the reasoning behind our investigation of Angas weaving in 1979. Apart from the evidence of non-Nigerian museums, which is not always to be relied upon, the only other clue we possessed was a brief reference by Temple that the 'Angas weave strong cloth, about nine inches wide'. Temple was referring to the plains Angas rather than those up on the plateau; but it was to the latter which circumstances obliged us to confine our investigations.²¹

Thanks to the generous help of the Chief of the Angas, Pius Dyiltu, we were able to meet some Angas weavers in the village of Dawaki not far from Amper in the Pankshin region. No one was actually weaving and no looms were set up in the village though we were told that there were one or two about in the remote bush. From questioning it became clear that the Angas loom, at least as used in Dawaki, was essentially of the Hausa type. What we were able to see was a quantity of loom equipment, beaters and heddles, as well as a good cross section of the cloth woven by the Angas.

The beaters, which the Angas called *majepi* (compare with the Hausa term *masafi* or *matsefi*) were essentially rather narrow, five to six inches wide, versions of characteristic Hausa types with leather-



242 The Angas village of Dawaki, near Pankshin. A typical Angas hill stronghold. Formerly there were many Angas weavers working in the Shendam hills.

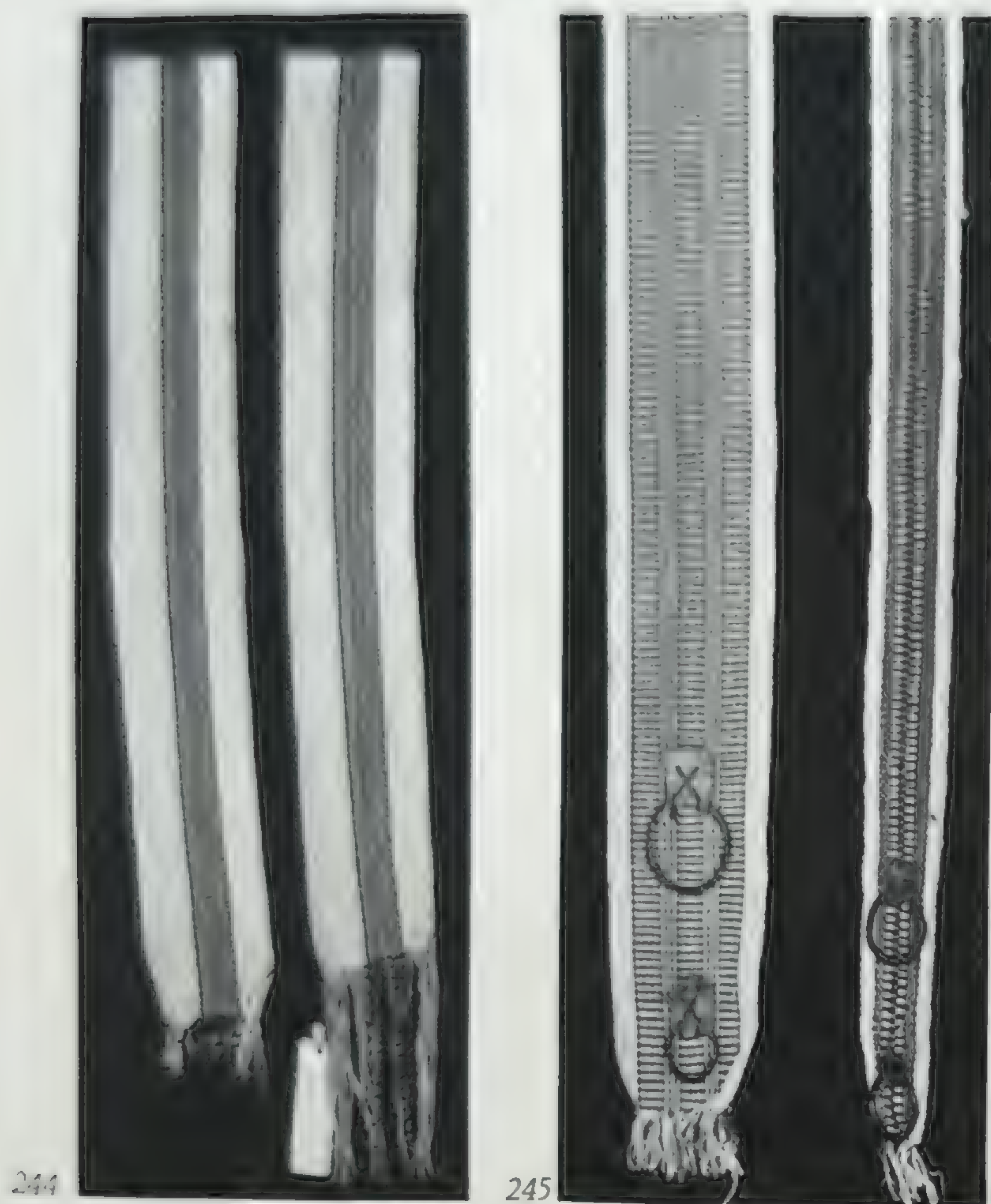
243 Detail of an Angas beater used at Dawaki. 1979.



covered bowls and tops. Two methods of beater suspension were in use, one the normal type with cords attached to both ends of the top, and the other type which we have associated with the *luru* loom, with a single leather tab in the centre of the top of the beater. The pedals attached to one set of heddles were of the usual Hausa sideways type; and these heddles were linked by means of a rocker (the Hausa *shuwaka*). All the equipment which we saw in Dawaki was warped up for the weaving of plain white, hand spun, cotton strip.

Our impression in Dawaki and other hill Angas villages was that weaving was dying out; but we did obtain evidence that there was some greater degree of activity among the Angas in the plains. In the hills such weaving as there was depended upon locally grown cotton, spun by both men and women, and a local dye of shades varying from yellow to dark brown which was made from certain leaves boiled up with alkali. There was also evidence of the use of indigo.

The brown to yellow dye formed an essential element in the cloth most specific to the Angas and known as *mbat*. The cloth was very thick, using four-ply yarn for both warp and weft, and it contained the



244 Angas warp-faced cloth called *mbat*, collected before 1917. British Museum, London. 245 Modern Angas girths, known in most northern markets by the Hausa name *majayi*.

characteristic central strip of warp pattern looking rather like a long strip of some kind of basketwork. Indeed, the technique used to weave this type of pattern is known as compound basket weave, using an alternation of double warps and wefts. In this particular method of patterning all the colour is in the warp and none in the weft. Hence, the method is known as reversible warp-faced patterning. Its use among the Angas was the only example which we encountered in Nigeria of this technique being exploited on the narrow horizontal loom.

This *mbat* cloth served a number of purposes in the traditional life of the Angas. It was used for the manufacture of shrouds. We saw one such cloth sewn up into the form of a large grain sack, *kuluk mbat*. Its owner told us that during his lifetime it would continue to serve this useful storage function; and on his death it would be turned into his shroud. The Angas call these shrouds *budu bigim mbat*, we were told. Cloth of the *mbat* type, however, has functions for the living as well as the dead. It is made up into a ceremonial dress consisting of a sash-like garment worn over one shoulder, with other cloths worn round the head and round the waist. There is an excellent

sash of this kind in the museum at Jos, where it is labelled *gat*. *Mbat* cloth is used as marriage gifts, as a wrapper for a first child, as part of dress for dances and all sorts of ceremonies.

Apart from *mbat*, the Angas produce more conventional strip cloth. This could be made up into plain white shrouds for those who could not afford *mbat*. Dyed blue it was also sewn up into aprons, very like those worn by the Eloi, for male use on ceremonial occasions. We were shown some of these aprons by the Chief of Dawaki. These garments were kept in a special house in the village where also were stored such items of ritual importance as the village drums. The aprons were called *banta*, presumably the same as the Hausa *bante* meaning undergarment of the loincloth variety. It is probable that these ceremonial aprons, which occur among several groups not only in Nigeria but in many other West African regions, have a common origin with the *bante* undergarment. The Angas *banta* were made from quite narrow strip, about two inches wide. We were told this was woven by the Angas; and it is certain that the loom equipment which we saw was quite suited to such a purpose.

Mbat is yet another example of that phenomenon in Nigeria of a very distinctive cloth being woven by craftsmen in a very limited area or being used by a limited number of people for specific purposes of traditional import. The question remains whether *mbat* is the same material, or related to the material used in the preparation of girths, *majayi*. These girths are quite common in a series of markets in a large circle round the Bauchi Plateau. We have found them as far south as Bida and as far north as Ngelzarma in Borno State on the road between Potiskum and Maiduguri. Typologically they are closer to *mbat* than to anything else we have seen in Nigeria. They could not, however, possibly be the product of a weaving industry as much in decline as that which we found among the hill Angas. Perhaps there exist Angas or related weavers in villages along the edge of the plateau who make these strips which are then widely distributed. The actual process of sewing on the iron rings is executed by specialists in the markets where these girths are sold, and not by the weavers.

An interesting feature of the Angas was that their normal daily dress showed no trace of a particular weaving tradition. Angas cloth, even *mbat* in the form of grain sacks, had essentially a ritual importance connected with various rites of passage and religious ceremonies of a traditional kind. It is this element of

tradition, above all in connection with funeral rites, which has kept many of the minor Nigerian weaving industries alive. In many cases we have seen this traditional use of cloth surviving the demise of local weaving by means of a reliance on a specialist external source of supply. The Gbari *bubu* cloth again provides a good example. It is highly probable that in studying these minor weaving and specialist cloth-using groups we are observing various evolutionary stages at the same time. In other words, some groups who attach special importance to cloths may have stopped weaving entirely and have come to rely on outside sources, while other groups continue to weave on a scale so small that the continuance of the craft cannot be guaranteed. We suspect that there may well be several peoples in the plateau region and along the Benue valley who fall into one or other of these categories who have escaped all notice in the literature as being weavers past or present.

246 An Angas grain sack, sewn from strips of *mbat* and called *kuluk mbat*. These sacks also serve as shrouds and are then called *budu bigim mbat*. Dawaki, 1979.



Notes

¹ C. K. Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom*, London 1931, remains an essential source on the Jukun. See also: O. Temple, *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria*, Lagos 1922, pp. 172-8; A. Rubin, *The Arts of the Jukun-speaking Peoples of Northern Nigeria*, Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University 1969; H. R. Palmer, *Sudanese Memoirs*, 3 vols, Lagos 1928 (Vol. III contains the Kano Chronicle)

² Meek, *op. cit.*, p. 29

³ H. Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, London 1857-8, Vol. II, p. 578

⁴ According to Temple, *Northern Nigeria*, *op. cit.*, p. 174, Wukari was founded some time after 1815.

⁵ Barth, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 580.

⁶ See: C. K. Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria*, London 1925, Vol. I, Pls 62, 63 and 64.

⁷ We are most grateful for help given us by the Aku of Wukari and his officials in collecting these words.

⁸ Meek, *Sudanese Kingdom*, *op. cit.*, p. 431, refers to this cloth by a Hausa word, *kwashi*. He describes it as being embroidered. He was, of course, mistaken. The decoration is by weft inlay. It is clear that Meek was little interested in the technicalities of weaving.

⁹ B. Menzel, *Textilien aus Westafrika*, Berlin 1972, Vol. II, Pl. 450. This is certainly no Ilorin cloth. While the strip is rather wider than usual for the Jukun, the pattern of the inlay, to judge from this rather small-scale illustration, can only be Jukun.

A characteristic *kyadze* cloth, collected by Dr Rubin in Wukari in 1965, is illustrated in: R. Sieber, *African Textiles and Decorative Arts*, New York 1972, p. 188.

¹⁰ *Akya* cloths are usually ascribed to Cameroun. See, for example: J. L. Larsen, *The Dyer's Art, Ikat, Batik, Plangi*, New York 1976, pp. 66 and 69.

Bernard Fagg very kindly allowed us to photograph an *akya* cloth which he had acquired in the market at Baissa.

For the trade in these cloths between Nigeria and Cameroun, see: E. M. Chilver, 'Nineteenth-century Trade in the Bamenda Grassfields', in Z. A. & J. M. Konczacki, *An Economic History of Tropical Africa*, Vol. I, London 1977. See also: F. W. H. Migeod, *Through British Cameroons*, London 1925, p. 220. Migeod noted the dyeing process at Wukari.

¹¹ For illustrations of *akya* cloth in use in Cameroun, see, for example: J. A. Ngwa, *A New Geography of Cameroon*, London 1978, p. 120; T. Northern, *The Sign of the Leopard. Beaded Art of Cameroon*, Connecticut 1975, p. 119.

¹² See, for example: T. J. Hutchinson, *Narrative of the Niger, Tshadda and Binue Exploration*, London 1855, p. 99; Meek, *Sudanese Kingdom*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

¹³ Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

¹⁴ Meek, *Sudanese Kingdom*, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

¹⁵ R. Armstrong, 'The Idoma-speaking Peoples', in D. Forde, ed., *Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence*, London 1970.

¹⁶ See: L. & B. Bohannon, *The Tiv of Central Nigeria*, London 1969, p. 9.

¹⁷ We must thank the Nigerian Tobacco Company for its help to us in Gboko. Without the help of Lucas O. Ashaolu and one of his assistants, Benjamin Terrumun Saruun, we would never have been able to communicate with Tiv weavers around Gboko, let alone find them.

¹⁸ Bohannon, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹⁹ R. C. Abraham, *The Tiv People*, Lagos 1933, pp. 216-17.

²⁰ E. D. Morel, *Nigeria, its peoples and its problems*, London 1911, p. 127.

²¹ Temple, *Northern Nigeria*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-17, for Temple's account of the Angas.

6

The woman's vertical loom

The vertical loom in Nigeria is in all but a few cases used by women. In some parts of the country it co-exists with the horizontal loom used by men; in some places it is to be found on its own, the men not being weavers. Within Nigeria there are five major areas where the woman's vertical loom is widely used.

First: there are women weaving throughout Yorubaland. We have found them in Ogun, Oyo, Ondo and Kwara States. They would seem to fall into two distinct groups, those of western Yorubaland on the one hand, and those of the Ekiti area (in Ondo State) to the east who have since at least the sixteenth century belonged to a distinct group of their own with their own methods of weaving and traditions of cloth use. In the past the craft was very widely distributed indeed. Today the trend has been rather towards concentration in major towns like Ilorin, Ilesha and the surrounding countryside. Until recently Ijebu-Ode and Ondo were important weaving towns; today the craft survives on a much reduced scale in Ijebu-Ode but has virtually disappeared in Ondo.

Second: in the northern Confluence region, a term which we have used here in a wider sense to cover a large tract of country lying to the north of the two rivers and stretching towards Hausaland, including Abuja and Nasarawa Emirates, there are important concentrations of women weavers. This region lies in Niger State, Benue State, the Federal Capital Territory, and in that small portion of Kwara State to the east of the Niger. There are several groups in this area including Hausa settlers, Nupe and Nupe-related people such as the Ganagana and the Gede. Probably the most important weavers in this region are the Nupe in Bida and among the northern Igbira whose towns include Koton-Karifi, Abaji and Toto.

Third: the southwest Confluence area, stretching from eastern Kwara State into northern Bendel State, which is one of the richest of all Nigerian weaving areas both in the number of its weavers and in the diversity of the cloth which they produce. There are many quite distinct groups living here, with different languages and backgrounds. Their weaving, however, possesses certain common elements, perhaps because of past intermingling of cloth for cultural and ritual functions. The main weaving centres in this area are in and around Okene, Amuro, Igara, Ososo and Kabba; and several smaller, but none the less very important, weaving groups are to be found in outlying districts such as those occupied by the Akoko Edo and Ogidi peoples.

Fourth: there are numerous women weavers among the Ibo-speaking people in southeastern Nigeria. They are concentrated into three quite separate groups. In Imo State we find the town of Akwete whence comes the best known of all the women's cloth of Nigeria. Indeed, the fame of Akwete is such that the name has often been used to cover the entire genre of cloths woven by women in Nigeria on the vertical loom, a fact which has somewhat confused many past studies of the subject. A second group of weavers is that found in Asaba, on the west bank of the Niger in Bendel State, and around it in a circle of about fifteen miles radius. The cloths here are very distinctive and have their own cultural importance. The third weaving area embraces Nsukka and Abakaliki in eastern Anambra State. It is rather less sophisticated in its designs than the weaving in the other two regions; and its

247 *The Yoruba sewosen loom set up in the Oyoye family compound. This loom was one of six preparing cloths for a forthcoming age set ceremony in Owo in 1979.*





connection with the other Ibo-speaking weaving groups may well be somewhat remote.¹

Fifth: in northern Nigeria women weavers are to be found scattered throughout the States of Sokoto, Kaduna, Kano and Bauchi. There are many such weavers in and around towns like Zaria, Kano, Kaduna as well as smaller urban communities and villages. In some places there are concentrations of weavers: in others there may only be two or three at work.

Apart from these five main groups, there are small numbers of women weavers in many other parts of Nigeria. Some Tiv women, for example, still weave in villages in Gongola and Benue States: we have found them around Gboko and Katsina Ala. Weaving among Tiv women, as is also the case with Tiv male weaving, is clearly very much on the decline. No doubt this is the situation with other groups as well. Since the woman's vertical loom is usually used either indoors or within the enclosure of a compound wall, it is very easy to pass it by without observing it. This loom does not draw attention to itself as does the narrow horizontal loom with its long warps pointing like arrows to the looms and their male weavers.

There exist two categories of vertical loom in Nigeria which are used by men. The first is the raffia loom, which is used by male weavers among the Anang people in Cross River State. The second is a very specialized loom intimately connected with Benin Court tradition, that used by the *Owina N'Ido* weavers in Benin City. We will have something to say about both these categories of male users of the vertical loom at the end of this book.

The weavers

Women's weaving in Nigeria is a domestic craft, carried on within the confines of a house or compound. The loom can be located in the weaver's own room, in a corridor or, in some districts, in a raised verandah surrounding the house, the actual position of the loom depending on place and tribal group. Each weaver has her own loom. Hence, there may be as many looms in a house as there are women occupants. In one Igbara compound in Okene I saw no less than thirty-two looms. On the other hand, particularly in the north, it is quite common to find but a single loom in a village, there being but one weaver at work in the community.

The time spent at the loom depends very much on the weaver's age. After completing her household duties, cooking, caring for the children and, in many rural communities, helping on the farm, particularly at harvest time, a woman may well spend the rest of her day weaving, a period which could be between four and nine hours. Younger girls, before schooling was introduced, could well spend eight hours a day at this work while a young mother might only spend four or five hours. Older women could work longer hours, at least until the work became too tiring. In some places women who no longer feel up to the strain of weaving have turned to spinning as their main occupation.

This domestic craft possesses the supreme advantage of flexibility. The weaver works at home and can turn to the loom at any moment in the day when she is temporarily free from other duties. She can talk to her friends while weaving; and she can work at the loom with her baby tied securely to her back. Household distractions do not seem to affect the weaver's concentration on what is, after all, a most complex task. Young children do not interfere. In the course of my fieldwork covering the greater part of Nigeria I have never seen a child in play disturb a working weaver by, for example, meddling with the tempting bundles of yarn which lie, inevitably, in the area of the loom.

When working in close proximity, in the same house or compound for example, weavers usually seem willing to help each other in such tasks as the winding of yarn on to bobbins and the cutting of the woven cloth from the loom; and they will lend each other pieces of equipment. Most weavers do not seem to be particularly possessive about their looms; and many will allow friends and children of friends to work at a partially woven cloth if they, themselves, have to be elsewhere.²

It is difficult to provide statistics for the craft of women's weaving in Nigeria today. In some areas weaving is flourishing. In others, however, it is very much on the decline; and, in yet others where formerly there were many weavers now there are none at all. There are two main factors which help to explain this decline. First, the introduction of compulsory schooling has undoubtedly interfered with the traditional method of transmission of weaving skills from mother or grandmother to young girl, a process which would have turned the girl into a skilled weaver by her early teens. Second, the rise in the price of cotton in recent years has diminished the profits to be derived

248 A recent *gandaro* cloth to be worn by a Chief, here being demonstrated by a weaver's son.

from the craft, which has had to compete with factory-made cloth. Lack of profit has certainly discouraged many weavers from continuing to work at this occupation.

An Owo Chief now living in Lagos gave me a very good instance of this process of decline. His grandmother, he said, spent every spare moment of her day at the loom. His mother wove from time to time, but certainly not on a regular basis. His sister had been taught to weave, but did not practise her skill. His daughters did not even know what weaving was. He added that his own experience was typical of many families in modern Owo.

The evidence of decline is all too apparent in many Nigerian towns. I have seen in places once famed for their women's cloth large numbers of looms leaning against walls, dusty and abandoned. Omu-Aran, in Kwara State, was reported to have had in 1936 half a dozen or more looms in every compound.³ My research in 1978 and 1979, involving much enquiry over a considerable period of time, failed to reveal a single loom in use. In the Ekiti area of Ondo State, once a great centre for the weaving craft, and still today the producer of magnificent cloths, I saw many abandoned looms, silent witnesses to decline.

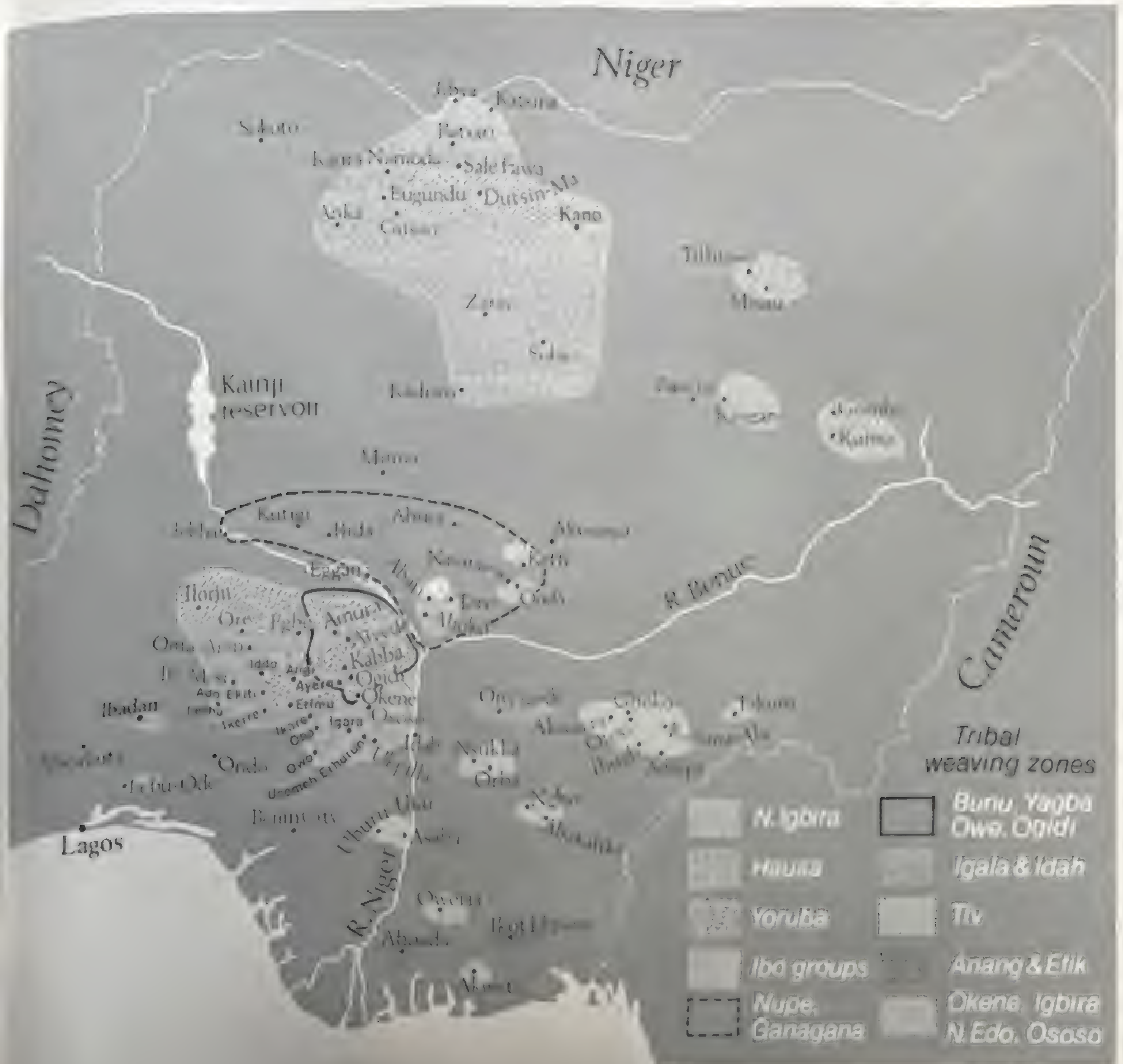
Ore, in Kwara State, provides yet another instance of the decline of this craft. Now a prosperous trading town, once, like Omu-Aran, it was a major weaving centre. Today there is very little handwoven cloth on sale in the market and my enquiries suggested that no one in the town still wove. The memory of past weaving, however, is preserved in a particularly concrete form, a statue of a weaver seated at her loom located in a prominent position facing the market place. This was erected in 1977 by the townspeople as a memorial to the original basis for their prosperity. In times past, when work on the farm had to stop because of the onset of the rainy season, the men of Ore used to take cloths woven by the women down river by boat to the famous cloth market of Epe on the north bank of the Lagos lagoon, whence much of it found its way across the lagoon and along creeks to the Badagry market to the west of Lagos. So successful were these ventures into trade that the people of Ore finally gave up both farming and weaving to concentrate on commerce. Many of them now trade on a permanent basis in the city of Lagos. Ore women traders today sell a few old cloths of beautiful workmanship, and they handle small quantities of new cloth from surrounding villages as well as baby ties (*oja*) from Ilorin. As a

weaving centre Ore has been a victim of its own success.

Weaving, however, is by no means in decline in some parts of Nigeria. In both Akwete in Imo State and Okene in Kwara State, for example, the craft is thriving. Here the weavers have been able to adapt their skills to the use of new yarns and the execution of new patterns; and this should ensure them a secure future. In weaving communities like these young weavers are still involved in the craft as were their mothers and grandmothers; and they devote as much energy and time as their forebears not only to the weaving of traditional cloths but also to the creation of new designs.

A recent development which may well help in the preservation of the women's weaving craft in some parts of Nigeria at least is the starting of small schools run by individual weavers, where girls who wish to learn the craft can take up apprenticeships. There are schools of this kind in both Kwara and Ondo States. They provide opportunities for girls who do not come from weaving families and hence cannot learn the craft at home. The courses, in apprenticeship form, last between two and three years; and the girl pupils may well have to leave home to take part. Our impression was that the teachers in these schools were excellent weavers who, because they came from a number of different traditions, and were equipped with a wide repertoire of patterns, might well provide a bridge between various weaving groups of a kind which has not existed before. One outcome of this kind of development has been the production of cloths which do not conform precisely to any one regional pattern. Alongside such schools the more traditional type of apprenticeship, similar to that found in some male weaving groups, also exists. Here, the student or students will contract to work for a skilled weaver for a specified period, usually two or three years. Unlike male weaving apprentices, however, these female students usually pay for their instruction not only with their labour but also with cash. Our impression has been that both in the creation of schools and the operation of the apprenticeship system the trend has been towards concentration of weaving in fewer localities and the production of cloths which might be said to reflect national rather than regional taste.

Women weavers, unlike their male counterparts in Nigeria, do not appear traditionally to have organized themselves into guilds or professional associations, their only important links with their craft outside the



240 Map showing the distribution of the woman's vertical loom in Nigeria. All the place names shown represent weaving regions and do not necessarily indicate demographic importance.

household being with individual suppliers of yarn or orders to completed cloths. Recently, however, there has been a significant development in Akwete, where a weaver's association was started in 1960. This will be referred to again in Chapter 10.



250 An Okene Igbara weaver showing the height of her loom. The loom is placed in the verandah of the house and is made from local wood.

The loom

The woman's vertical loom in Nigeria is constructed in basically the same way throughout the country.⁴ There are, of course, regional differences which will be discussed in the appropriate places later on. At first sight the vertical loom may appear rather chaotic, little more than an assortment of sticks of varying sizes stuck into a warp mounted on a rough and ready frame. In fact, while in basic principles quite simple, the Nigerian woman's vertical loom is a most sophisticated piece of equipment capable of weaving cloths with patterns of extraordinary complexity. Its operation calls for great skill and experience. Its components, often appearing somewhat improvised, are in fact ideally suited to their respective tasks; and they demonstrate that a proper selection of local materials can create an apparatus which, in its output, can rival handlooms anywhere else in the world.

In the description of this loom which follows we have, so to speak, imagined a standard loom the measurements of which, in practice, might vary from house to house, let alone from region to region. We

have also tried to confine ourselves to the rather basic form of equipment. Some looms of this family can acquire a complexity which almost defies description in clear and simple language.

The frame of the loom consists of two vertical poles, the uprights, which are crossed by two horizontal beams. The uprights are either cut from locally available wood or, more usually, are simply the trunks of small trees. The horizontal beams, both top and bottom, are invariably made from ribs of the raffia palm which provide rounded and completely smooth surfaces over which yarn can pass. The length of the uprights is determined either by the height of the ceiling of the room in which the loom is set up or by the available dimensions of the wood used. The range of heights is between six and eleven feet. The uprights are almost vertical; but they in fact lean at a small angle against the wall, their bases being about six inches away from the wall. The tops of the uprights may be attached to the wall by means of nails or wooden pegs. The bottoms of the uprights may either be sunk into the ground, the traditional manner, or, in more modern looms, be fixed in blocks of concrete.

Of the two horizontal beams, the upper one is slung from the uprights by means of loops of rope or sisal twist. It should be more or less at the height of the shoulders of a standing person, and the security of its attachment is of great importance, for on it depends the tension of the warp. The lower horizontal beam is lashed to the uprights at a point somewhere between two and six inches above ground level. In some districts the uprights are connected near their bases by a horizontal bar slotted into holes in the uprights; and the lower horizontal beam may be secured by means of ropes to this bar.

A new development is a loom specially made by carpenters so that it can easily be dismantled and moved from place to place. The uprights, of rectangular section, have each a vertical row of holes into which pegs can be driven to support the upper horizontal beam in various positions. We have noted a number of forms of this carpentered loom, all enjoying the great advantage of being easily mounted in a room with concrete floors into which pits cannot be dug to support the uprights. In an age when more Nigerians are moving about the country and living in non-traditional houses, this type of loom has enabled a weaver to work far away from her home region, often in a district where one would not expect to find women weavers at all.



251 *A carpentered loom in Ilesha, used by some western Yoruba women. This particular loom is in a weaving school.*

Apart from the basic frame, the vertical loom has the following main components: the heddle, supplementary heddles, the main shed sticks, supplementary shed sticks, the tenter, the shuttle, the sword, the thick web stick, the thin web stick, bobbins and miscellaneous items used in patterning. Most of these loom parts, the sword being a notable exception, are usually made from raffia palm ribs. Heddles can, on occasion, use sticks (heddle sticks) made from thin metal rod, and the shuttle may be made from cane. Bobbins can be devised from a wide variety of local materials.

The heddle is usually made from thin raffia rib, either as a single or a double stick, with the leashes made from twine. The heddle can be between just under two feet to over four feet in length, depending on the width of the web to be woven. Supplementary heddles, if used, are made in the same way as the main heddle. The most distinctive feature of heddles, and supplementary heddles, in the Nigerian vertical loom, is their extreme flexibility. As part of the weaving

process, the heddles must be capable of being flexed in all three dimensions; and the heddle sticks must therefore have whip-like properties.

The typical loom uses three main shed sticks, of raffia palm and with a circular section an inch or more in diameter. Some looms only use two; and there can be four. Three main shed sticks, however, serve major functions; and we will use a three-main-shed-stick loom as our norm. If we number these sticks from bottom to top as they would appear in the loom after warping up and before weaving has begun, the three sticks would have the following functions:

- a. Shed stick No. 1 serves to make a shed for the purpose of heddle making, and, its duty in this capacity performed, it is then removed from the loom.
- b. Shed stick No. 2 serves to make a shed counter to that made by the heddle.
- c. Shed stick No. 3 is used to help in the separation of the warp threads when the counter shed of stick No. 2 is brought into play.

All three shed sticks are longer than the width of the warp being woven, as their functions would suggest. As permanent loom equipment, indeed, they are usually longer than the widest warp likely to be woven on the loom to which they belong.

Supplementary shed sticks, which can be used as alternatives to supplementary heddles in patterning, are usually thinner than the main shed sticks and may be flat rather than of circular section. Width or diameter is generally of the order of half an inch.

The tenter is made from a flat piece of raffia palm shaved to a point at both ends. These points are stuck into the edges of the web just below the line of weaving so as to prevent the selvages from being pulled in towards each other. As weaving proceeds the tenter is moved on.

The shuttle is also made from a narrow flat section of raffia palm, usually longer than the width of warp to be woven. Most shuttles have straight ends; but some, notably from Ilorin, have shallow notches at either end to help hold the yarn in place. The yarn is wound along the shuttle in such a way that there is a slight build-up at either end to help hold the yarn on the shuttle.

The sword, which also performs the function of beater, is, in the weaver's eyes, by far the most important part of the loom. It is a prized possession with which the weaver will not part if she can possibly help it. In some areas the sword is passed down through the generations from mother to daughter; in



252 *The Yoruba sewosen loom set up, showing the many supplementary heddles used in the sewosen patterns. The beautifully carved sword stick handle is a feature of Owo looms.*

others it is carried before the body of a weaver in her funeral procession. Made from very hard wood, the species of which varies from place to place, it is usually carved by some male member of the weaver's family. As its name suggests, it is shaped like a real sword with a blade of narrow elliptical shape about three feet long and a handle which may be given quite elaborate carved decoration. The design of the sword handle can be diagnostic of the weaving group whence it came.

The two web sticks only come into operation after warping up and at the commencement of weaving. The thick web stick may well be the same as shed stick No 1, returning to the loom after being withdrawn during the process of heddle making, or it may be quite a different stick. Its function is to make a cross marking the bottom limit of the woven cloth; and throughout weaving it is held in place by cords at either end which are attached to the lower horizontal beam and let out from time to time as weaving proceeds and the warp is moved further round the loom. The thin web stick, a very thin and flexible piece of raffia palm rib, complements the thick web stick in fixing the lower limit to the woven cloth.

Apart from the items of equipment used on the loom, weaving involves some pieces of equipment used for heddle making and yarn winding.

Yarn must be wound on to bobbins. The shape of the bobbin, and its material, varies from place to place depending on local tradition and the availability of materials. Ekiti and Owo weavers, for example, use corn cobs as bobbins. In Ilorin one can find metal rods. Elsewhere I have seen sticks stuck in seed pods, discs of calabash, and pieces of raffia palm stuck into cotton reels used for this purpose. The yarn is transferred to the bobbin from a winder of some kind. The simplest form of winder is a pair of sticks stuck in the ground to hold the skein. More elaborate forms are of the same shape as those used with the male horizontal loom. There are two main types in this category. The first is a wooden cross with pegs stuck in the ends of the four arms, the whole rotating in a horizontal plane on an axis fixed, usually, in a bottle. The second is a basket-like structure of conical shape, its apex formed by a lump of clay, half a coconut or some other suitable object, to enable the apparatus to rotate on a vertical shaft fixed at one end in the ground. Small bobbins are used for the making of inlay patterns, often with the help of short sticks or metal rods or bars which serve more or less as auxiliary swords, just as the bobbins used for this kind of inlay are really small shuttles.

The vertical loom is warped up directly on to the frame. The two horizontal beams are set so that the distance between them is just over half the length of the cloth to be woven; and the warp is wound round the two beams in what is in effect a spiral. When weaving is completed there will remain a short stretch of unwoven warp, between six and ten inches, which has to be cut through to open out the finished cloth. While warping up the loom, the shed sticks must be held in position. This is done by means of a cord consisting of two strands of cotton or sisal which is fixed to the left hand side of the two horizontal beams and so twisted that the main shed sticks can be inserted between the strands and thereby held securely in place during warping up. As we have noted, most weaving groups use three main shed sticks. The primary cross is made between sticks Nos. 1 and 2, and stick No. 3, where present, is used to divide the warp threads on the front side of stick No. 2. The purpose is to control tension and, by appropriate movement, to separate warp threads when stick No. 2 is being used to make a

253 An Okene Igbira weaver warping up. The process of making a continuous warp is here clearly seen. The Igbira stool is a highly prized part of the equipment and passed down from each generation.



254 An Ibo weaver from Uburu-Uku, in the process of making a heddle. Between the fingers of her left hand are the figures of eight from which the leashes of the heddle are composed

counter shed. Because the threads crossing stick No. 3 all come from the same side of stick No. 2, it is possible to move stick No. 3 up and down behind stick No. 2. Thus it will be seen that the correct warping up of these sticks is essential to the operation of the loom. If inlay patterns are called for, then a fourth main shed stick will have to be included in the warping up stage.

For warping up, the end of the warp is first tied to the lower horizontal beam. The bobbin holding the warp yarn is then passed round the beams and in and out of the shed sticks from left to right and in an anti-clockwise direction, passing straight down the back between the top and bottom beams so that all the crosses are on the side of the warp facing the weaver. A warp consisting of a plain background will make, so to speak, a single spiral. To introduce warp stripes, of course, the process of winding must be interrupted so that yarn of one colour can be replaced by yarn of another, the two threads being tied together so as not to break the continuity of the spiral. The end result is a warp which looks very much like a wide endless belt running round the two horizontal beams with all the shed sticks and other weaving devices fixed into the front side facing the weaver.

The mounting of each warp for a new cloth involves, inevitably, the making of a new heddle; and this can only be done after warping up has otherwise been completed. For heddle making the following are required: a very flexible length of raffia palm rib to serve as a heddle stick (and, of course, of a length greater than the warp width), and a short rod, usually of bamboo, with a length of cord attached to one end of it, along which the heddle leashes as they are made will be threaded. Sometimes, instead of this cord, a second heddle stick can be used. For the leashes of the heddle there is required a further length of twine. While in

theory simple enough, heddle making calls for great skill. The problem is to create a system of double loops, figures of eight, out of twine, with one loop running round a firm support of some kind and the other loop going round every alternate warp thread such that when the whole assembly is pulled away from the loom it takes the alternate warp threads with it, thus creating a shed. The heddle stick provides the firm support, the backbone as it were, of the heddle, yet is flexible enough to permit the heddle to bend in all three dimensions during the course of operation. The bamboo tool is a convenient device to help in the making of loops round the warp and heddle stick. The loops are first made to include the bamboo tool. Every so often, the accumulated loops are pushed off the tool on to the cord, and a new series of loops begun. When completed, the heddle looks rather like some enormous, but headless, centipede crawling across the warp, the heddle stick being the body and the visible part of the loops being the legs. In fact it consists of a double spiral, the upper loops of which are tight around the heddle stick and the lower loops, through which pass the alternate warp threads, being loose but dimensionally secure because of the twine core or second heddle stick which also passes through them. It need hardly be said that the quality of the cloth woven with the aid of this device depends very much on the regularity of the loops and the manner in which they are attached to the heddle stick or sticks.

255 An Akoko weaver from Unemeh Erhurun, picking out the next warp thread to be included in the new heddle. Here can be seen the leashes that have been pushed off the bamboo rod on to the cord.



256 Detail of a complicated heddle showing the heddle cord and a part of heddle stick. (The Akoko)

Weaving

The first steps in weaving are to place the two web sticks through the spaces in the warp created by the shed and the counter shed, such that in this position the thin web stick is above the thick web stick. The thick web stick may, in fact, be main shed stick No. 1 in a different role, or it may be quite a different stick. It must, at all events, be both fairly thick and rigid. The thin web stick is no more than a thin and flexible strip of raffia palm rib. The purpose of these two sticks is to lock, as it were, in place the beginning of the web; and the thick web stick is attached to the horizontal beams in such a way as to prevent the whole warp slipping round unless the weaver allows it to do so by adjusting the cords locating the thick web stick in place.

Weaving begins with the creation of a shed by means of the heddle, which is pulled away from the warp towards the weaver. The sword is first used to help in the separation of the two sets of warp threads, and then it is inserted into the shed and twisted so as to keep the shed open while the shuttle is passed through. Finally, the sword is used to beat down the web, usually with two quick downward movements executed by the weaver's wrist and elbow, and then withdrawn. The counter shed is now made by pulling down towards the heddle the main shed stick No. 2 and then, with a quick movement of thumb and first finger, main shed stick No. 3 is brought down behind main shed stick No. 2, the purpose being to help separate the two sets of warp threads. The counter shed is opened, the shuttle passed and the web beaten in the same way as with the shed formed by the heddle. With the return of main shed sticks Nos. 2 and 3 to their original positions the cycle is completed.



An Okene Igbira demonstrating the different movements to operate the woman's vertical loom. The heddle is pulled forward a few inches at a time to create the first shed, into which the sword is inserted (257). The two shed sticks, No 1 and No 2, are then twisted to separate the warp and No 2 is brought down to the heddle position, thus creating the second shed (260). The web is then beaten by the sword with two sharp downward movements of the wrist or arm (261).



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The woman's vertical loom

After about ten inches of cloth has been woven it is necessary to start fixing the thick web stick. Both ends are attached to cords which are then wound round the lower horizontal beam. As weaving proceeds and the position of the heddle rises to a point where its operation is uncomfortable for the weaver, the whole warp can be moved down and round by letting out these cords. At the completion of weaving the gap between the beginning and the end of the web is on the front side of the loom at a point more or less midway between the two horizontal beams, and the cords locating the thick web stick now pass over the top horizontal beam and down the rear of the loom to their fixing points on the lower horizontal beam. These cords ensure that the cloth does not slip round during weaving, particularly under the force of the sword when used as beater.

The completed warp can either be slipped off the loom by dismounting the horizontal beams or it can be cut off through the short unwoven section, usually about ten inches, which remains. The ends of the cloth



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262 A weaver in Ile-Mesi unravels a heddle after completing a panel on the loom. 263 A rural weaver from Ile-Mesi using a loom placed in a shallow pit. She uses the edge of the pit as a seat.



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can be finished off by means of a chain loop, often called 'cowrie', or they can be left unfinished. At night, with an incompletely woven warp on the loom, tension can be removed by raising the lower horizontal beam and attaching it to the top horizontal beam; but this is not always done.

The weaving of inlay or inlay floats involves the use of an extra main shed stick (No. 4) and a number of supplementary heddles (or extra shed sticks) which are made in the same way as the main heddle. These supplementary heddles are always fixed to the front warp threads of the first shed. Separate shuttles are used; and, in the case of float patterns, small bobbins can be used as shuttles or the thread can be inserted by hand, the unwoven part left dangling down the warp.

The position of the weaver before the loom is important. Some weavers sit on the ground on mats. Others use stools. Because the level of the main heddle moves upward as weaving proceeds, and can only be brought down again after releasing the cords securing the thick web stick, some weavers whom I have

observed prefer to use a variety of seats, perhaps starting on the ground and then moving to stools of varying height. I have seen one weaver who had a sequence of three stools, each about four inches higher than its predecessor, specially reserved for weaving; by their use she could, as it were, move herself up the loom and thus reduce the number of times she had to let out the thick warp stick cords and move down the web. In order to obtain a comfortable seated position sufficiently low down the loom, some weavers in the Ilesha and Ekiti areas have dug pits below the lower horizontal beam. They can then sit upright on the floor with their legs in the pit and their feet beneath the lower horizontal beam. These pits can be simple holes in the ground, or they can be finished off tidily in plaster or cement.

The time taken to weave a cloth in Nigeria varies from place to place, weaver to weaver, and kind of cloth to kind of cloth. It usually takes a skilled weaver a day to warp up and make the heddle. It may take a further two days to complete a simple single panel

264 *An Okene Igbira loom at Isa-Ami, near Okene. These Okene weavers usually sit on a stool to work.*



The woman's vertical loom

cloth such as a baby tie. A more complicated warp pattern and a wider web naturally involves more time, perhaps five days or longer. The most elaborate designs using the finest of threads may involve a weaving process lasting two weeks. Most weavers, even if they have very different life styles, for example a young mother on the one hand and an older woman with few domestic responsibilities on the other, seem in my experience to take about the same time to weave the same kind of cloth. It rather looks that, once embarked upon the weaving of a cloth, there is a compulsion to get the task completed which results in a more or less constant time spent at the loom each day whatever other tasks have also to be accomplished.

Spinning

Before factory spun cotton yarn became so easily available the majority of weavers spun their own yarn. Hand spun cotton, moreover, has always been available in markets in the cotton growing regions of Nigeria. This was, and today still is, provided either by professional spinners who did not weave, or by older women who gave up weaving but continued to spin.

Before spinning the cotton has to undergo several preparatory processes. It must be ginned, that is to say separated from seeds and other impurities. This can be done by simply picking out the undesirable matter by hand, or by placing the cotton on a wooden block and rolling it with a metal bar. The seeds are easily loosened by this method and can then be picked out manually. After ginning comes carding, the process which brings the cotton fibres into more or less one alignment. The traditional Nigerian carding device is a bow, a cane bent into a semi-circle by means of a twine bowstring. The bow is held in the left hand over the ginned cotton, while the bowstring is made to vibrate so that it catches cotton fibres and fluffs them out in rough alignment.

The technique of spinning is much the same all over Nigeria. The ginned and carded cotton is wound loosely on a stick which is held in the left hand, and thread from this is guided through the fingers of the right hand on to the spindle. Depending upon type, the spindle can either rest on the ground or rotate in the air. Hausa, Fulani and Nupe spinners use a spindle with a clay whorl and a shaft of thin raffia palm which protrudes about half an inch below the whorl to form a point which is rested on a suitable hard surface, an enamel plate, a tin lid, or a piece of leather.

The cotton is sometimes lubricated to help spinning. I have seen Yoruba women use for this purpose a paste of cassava starch, and at Kuma near Gombe we saw spinners using a paste made from powdered limestone mixed with a kind of gum from a local tree.

265 Cotton seeds being pressed out of the raw cotton by a spinner in the West.



266 The same spinner carding the ginned cotton by means of a bow





268

A Yagba spinner from Aiyede, near Amura, demonstrates the main movements during spinning with the drop spindle. A new bundle of cotton is being attached to the spindle (267). Care must be taken to avoid thick bundles of fibres passing on to the spindle (268). The rapidly falling spindle pulls out the fibres from the bundle and aids rotation (269). A skilled spinner can spin a thread the length of her outstretched arms (270). The spun yarn is now wound on to the spindle itself. Cassava starch is sometimes used to aid lubrication of the fingers (271).



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Yarns

The traditional yarn for the woman's vertical loom in Nigeria is locally grown and prepared cotton; and the preparation of yarn is generally considered to be an integral part of the craft of weaving. Natural brown cotton has been the source of one colour. Indigo, obtained from species of *Lonchocarpus* and *Indigofera*, has long been important; and there exists a repertoire of other dyes based on local vegetable and mineral substances. More recently these have been reinforced and, often, replaced by modern chemical dyestuffs.

While there are still areas in northern and south-eastern Nigeria where women weavers rely mainly on local hand spun cotton, yet factory made yarn has been widely used in some parts of Nigeria for a considerable period. The Akwete cloths which are part of the Beving Collection in the Museum of Mankind (British Museum), London, are made from factory produced cotton; and these cloths reached London in 1934 and were certainly woven before that date. A weaver in Akwete, Madam Abigal Ekeke, told me that it was indeed a fact that in the 1930s factory made yarn was widely used in Akwete. In other regions factory made yarn may have arrived rather later, perhaps being at first used only for inlay patterning. Among the Igbira in Okene the major change to factory made cotton seems to have taken place only some twenty years ago. Today, factory made cotton can be used for both warp and weft, or as the warp in conjunction with a hand spun weft.

The local Nigerian silk, *sanyan* or *tsamiya*, has been, and still is to a limited extent, used by weavers among the Yoruba, particularly in Ilorin and Akure, and perhaps in Ilesha as well. Today, women who weave in *sanyan* are not easy to find. It is unlikely that there are still weavers who use this material exclusively; though one can find elderly weavers, in Ilorin for example, who will make a *sanyan* cloth on special order. Outside the Yoruba the use of *sanyan* does not seem to have been a feature of the vertical loom. I have no evidence that imported silks, either of the trans-Saharan *alharani* variety or silk yarns from Europe, ever played a significant part in weaving on this loom in Nigeria.

Today the vertical loom has discovered the bright attractions of synthetic fibres. Rayon, which first became popular after World War II, is much used for inlay and inlay float patterns, where it has often replaced the use of chemically dyed cotton. Another innovation of fairly recent date is lurex, which is now

widely used, either on its own or with rayon, for inlay and inlay float patterns. Some cloths, in Okene and Keffi for example, have warps entirely of lurex with factory-made cotton wefts: these have been woven on occasion for marriages and other ceremonies, and may be highly prized. Lurex comes in many colours, the choice of which depends upon the dictates of fashion. Today (1979) gold, silver and blue seem to be preferred.

Raffia is sometimes used in baby ties. It is chemically treated and then incorporated, with cotton, in both weft and warp. The tradition of the use of raffia with cotton appears to be of some antiquity, particularly in the Niger-Benue confluence area. The British Museum has some fine examples of such cloths including a beautiful cloth with a hand spun cotton warp and a raffia weft of bands of naturally dyed black and maroon: this particular cloth was collected in 1913. There is, indeed, evidence of the use of raffia for women's weaving in Nigeria as far back as the latter part of the eighteenth century.³

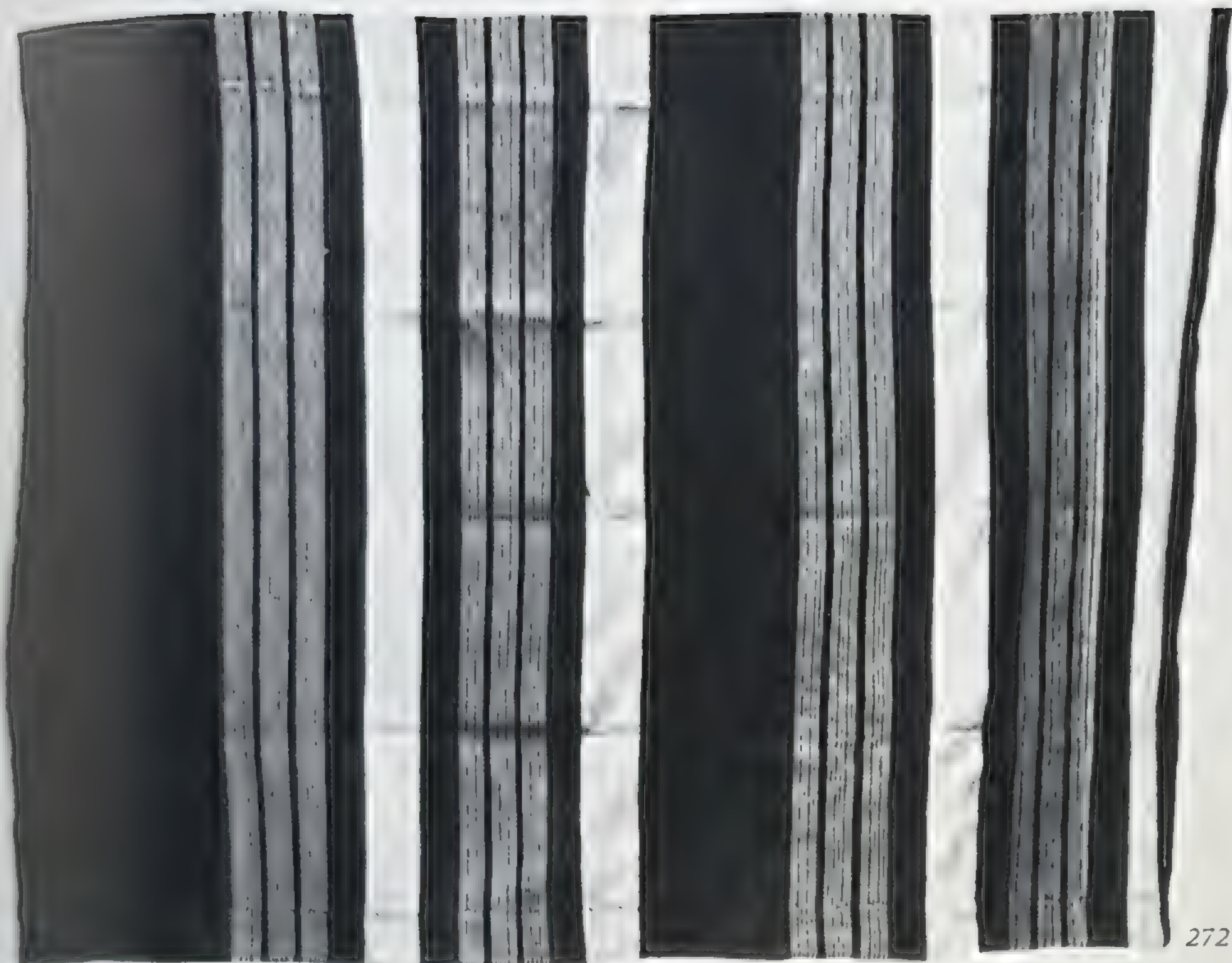
Patterns

Cloths woven on the vertical loom can be embellished by a wide range of designs and systems of pattern. The simplest technique involves warp stripes which are set up during the process of warping up the loom. The most common pattern involves indigo blue and brown on a warp of natural cotton colour. Warp striping can become extremely complex, particularly in the case of traditional cloths used for important ceremonials; and it may be used to identify these cloths by name.

An elaboration of the use of warp stripes is the employment of *ikat* in the warp. *Ikat* can produce results on the vertical loom quite as dramatic as it does on the horizontal loom of, for example, the male Yoruba weavers of Ilorin.

The vertical loom permits the use of weft band decoration just as much as warp stripes; and such bands are particularly common in traditional cloths woven south of the Niger-Benue confluence. Since these cloths are, in the main, warp faced, the weft band is partly obscured and is, in fact, what is technically known as a hidden-weft band. One finds this technique, for example, in Ekiti cloth as well as cloth woven in the Kabba district.

Another method of patterning, already noted in connection with cloth from the horizontal loom, is by means of holes, usually achieved by the separation of



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272 A Yoruba cloth from Owo showing the use of warp stripes only as decoration.

273 An Ogidi cloth, woven near Kabba, shows use of ikat in women's patterns.



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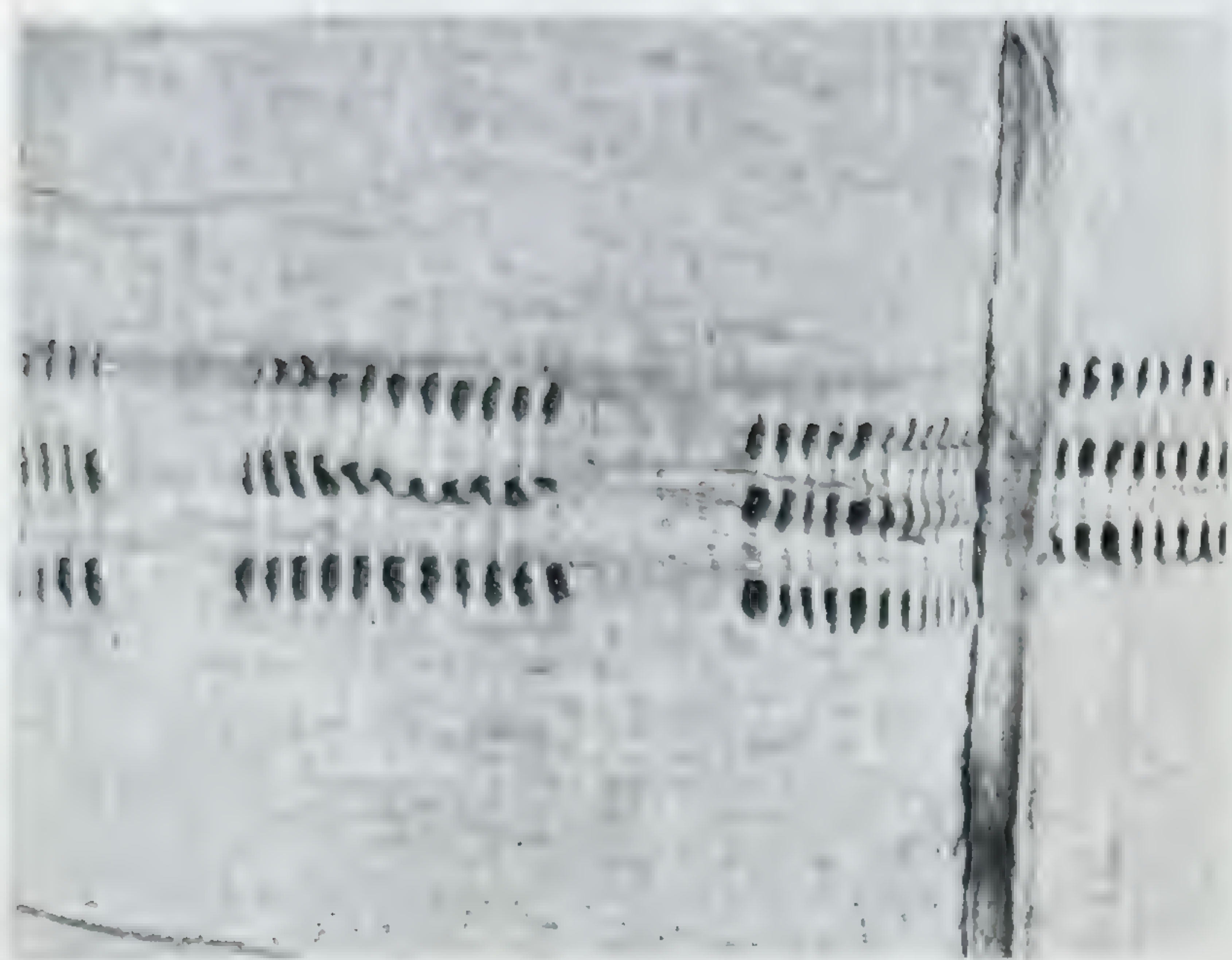


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274 A Yoruba cloth from Owo shows the use of hidden weft bands, an old technique still used today. 275 A basket weave pattern from the Asaba looms. A common pattern with women weavers throughout Nigeria.



275



276 Detail of holes and carry over technique used in a very old Yoruba woman's weave cloth, collected from Egga in 1841. British Museum, London



277 A hand spun cotton Asaba cloth known as aguba ocha, showing an interesting combination of holes and raised weft bands.

278 The yarn section of Okene market. Here a great variety of yarns are available. Many imported synthetic fibres can be seen alongside skeins from the Nigerian cotton mills.

parts of the warp into rows of bunched threads woven as to leave spaces in between. Such holes may be accompanied by the carrying over of warp threads, again as in some Yoruba cloths woven by men. Holes and carry-over are features of some cloths in the material collected at Egga in 1841 and now in the Museum of Mankind (British Museum) in London.

The very texture of the web can be used for patterning, either by decreasing or increasing the density of the weft. A variety of techniques can be used for this purpose, some involving the use of supplementary heddles. Particularly interesting in this context are some Okene cloths, usually white, which have very delicate raised warp patterns. The ultimate in web texturing must be the use of a piled weft where the weft is so arranged as to turn, when cut, into rows of tufts giving the cloth the appearance of a thick pile rug. Such piled or tufted cloths can be of ritual importance. They most frequently appear in the form of baby ties, originally used only in the southern part of Nigeria but now available in markets in nearly all the States in the country.

Inlay and inlay floats provide the most common form of pattern, next to warp striping, woven today. It is interesting that inlay is quite absent from the vertical loom cloths in the 1841 Egga collection which depend almost entirely on warp striping for their decoration. It is possible, therefore, that the technique is a fairly recent innovation. Our knowledge of older Nigerian textiles, however, is too defective to enable us to make any firm statements on this point. The technique of using inlay and inlay floats involves the use of supplementary weft threads which lie on the top of the web so as to reveal the pattern on one surface only. The analogy with inlay patterning by Yoruba male weavers, particularly in the Ilorin area, is obvious. The effect is achieved by lifting warp threads at quite large intervals, and passing a weft through such a shed. The weft in these circumstances will, of course, lie far more on one side of the cloth than on the other: indeed, on the reverse the supplementary weft all but disappears. These warp threads can be picked out by hand, or supplementary heddles can be used. With really complicated inlay there may be as many as twelve supplementary heddles. Some kind of inlay patterning is found among most of the Nigerian weavers using the vertical loom; but the most elaborate forms come from Akwete, Okene and Owo. It is an interesting fact that there are certain common features in inlay pattern throughout Nigeria.





279 Madam Esther Arowosafe, a prominent cloth seller in Ekiti. She is wearing a hand spun *apendiari* cloth—'the affluent will wear the best'. The shoulder cloth, woven from machine spun yarns, is called *elila-igi*, meaning 'a piece of wood'. In the foreground can be seen a Chief's *odiohihun* on the right, and a *kijipa* known as *ifagbo* on the left.

280 A farm smock sewn from hand spun cloth woven by Bunu women in Olle, near Kabba.

280



Cloth

The vertical loom, by virtue of its method of warping, produces cloths of limited length, in the general region of six to nine feet. Width, too, is limited by technical considerations: it usually falls into the range of between one and a half and two and a half feet. Some special cloths intended for the use of Chiefs have been woven at a greater length than usual. I have seen examples over twelve feet long. The web can also be wider than average, particularly in Akwete. It can also be much narrower: there are Nupe cloths in the collection of the Museum of Mankind which have a ten inch web. The cloth can be used, just as it comes off the loom, as a single panel; or it can be sewn selvedge to selvedge with one or more cloths to make a multi-panel cloth much as the strips from the male horizontal loom are sewn together. In width, many cloths from the vertical loom are no wider than the widest output of the Hausa *chakerikeri* loom, with which they can easily be confused in the eye of an inexperienced observer.

Cloth from the woman's vertical loom is, in the main, used for clothing; but it can be employed in a number of other ways as well. Cloths of a single panel make baby ties, head ties and pads to be put under headloads. The Yoruba, for example, also use single panels as shawls or extra waist wrappers. A single panel can also be made into the seat of a chair, or it can serve as a towel. With two panels, cloths can be worn as waist wrappers for women or as covering for young boys to wear about the house, so called 'cover cloths'. With three panels, this cloth can serve as a shroud, as a man's garment of the toga-like style, or as a kind of blanket or cover for protection at night against mosquitoes. Some shroud cloths may consist of as many as five panels sewn together.

In general the cloth from the vertical loom is used in the form in which it is woven and not cut into shapes as in the manner of tailoring broadcloth. There are exceptions, however. The Museum of Mankind has a pair of trousers of the *sokoto* variety made from cut and tailored cloth. Smocks are sometimes made in the same way in many parts of Nigeria, and, today, it is not uncommon to find modern-style dresses cut from Akwete or Okene cloth.

Women weavers dispose of their cloth in two main ways. First, they weave to special order. Second, either in person or through a middleman trader, the weaver can send her cloth to market. The precise form depends upon custom and varies from region to region. In Ilorin, for example, it is quite common for weavers to take their own cloths to market. In Moslem households it may be thought more appropriate for the weaver to deal with the market only through intermediaries. Some of the major Nigerian cloth markets, drawing on very large reservoir areas, must perforce depend for their operation to a great extent on long distance traders (*fatauci* in Hausa). In major weaving centres like Akwete a stock of cloths may be kept in the weavers' houses where it can be inspected by prospective purchasers in search of cloth of particularly good quality. It seems probable, however, that the bulk of the cloth woven on the vertical loom in Nigeria finds its way to some market or other. During my fieldwork in 1978 and 1979 I visited a very large number of markets, both large and small, in virtually all the Nigerian States; and it has been very rare indeed that I have failed to find at least some cloth from the woman's vertical loom on sale, even if it has only been in a single stall displaying a small selection of baby ties.

Skilled women weavers in Nigeria, as opposed to apprentices, generally weave for themselves. That is to say, they organize the various stages of the craft from



281 *Madam Meriyamo, an Okene Igbira weaver, wearing an older style cloth.*

the purchase of yarns to the disposal of the completed cloth for their own gain and in their own time. While in some Moslem areas those transactions which must take place beyond the confines of the compound may be conducted by husband or other male members of the family, the last word in cloth matters will remain with the weaver. A weaver in a poor family may depend upon the proceeds of the sale of one cloth to buy yarn for the next. Wealthier weavers may buy yarn in bulk from the big towns like Lagos, Port Harcourt or Ilorin. This last practice is common in major weaving centres like Akwete, Okene and Ilorin. Some weavers, particularly those who depend upon middlemen for the distribution of their wares, may accept advances of money for the purchase of yarn

against the security of the completed cloth, an arrangement which enables them to weave continuously: we found many examples of this kind of transaction both in Ilorin and in the Keffi district. The final profit, whatever the intermediate arrangements may be, returns to the weaver. While a useful addition to her resources, the sum may not be very great. It was estimated by a journalist in a Lagos newspaper in 1978 that, after all expenses, a five-hour weaving day seven days in the week would yield the weaver, after all expenses had been deducted, a net return of about 20 Naira (£16 or \$35) per month.

Not all cloth, of course, goes to market. The weaver may well produce cloths for her own and her family's use. Until quite recently it was the custom in many rural districts for the women of the household to meet virtually all their family cloth requirements from their own resources. They would not only weave but also grow cotton and spin yarn. Today, certainly in some northern States, this practice probably continues.

282 *A Jukun man wearing an Okene woman's weave cloth, which had been bought in the local market near Yelwa.*





283 An Ibo cloth from Akwete, showing use of extensive inlay motifs. British Museum, London 1966.



284 Typical tufted baby tie cloth probably woven on an Igara loom. These are available in most markets.

Notes

¹ See: C. S. Okeke, 'Traditions and Changes in Igbo Woven Designs', *Nigeria Magazine*, 1976.

² K. C. Murray, 'Women's weaving among the Yorubas of Omu-aran in Ilorin Province', *Nigerian Field*, 1936.

³ Murray, loc. cit.

⁴ The account of the construction and operation of the women's vertical loom in Nigeria which follows is based on my own observations; and the terminology devised here is my own.

There are a number of published descriptions of this equipment, not all of them either clear or entirely satisfactory. See, for example: H. Ling Roth, *Studies in Primitive Looms*, Halifax 1950, pp. 50-4; K. Kent, *Introducing West African Cloth*, Denver 1971, pp. 44-6; E. Broudy, *The Book of Looms. A History of the Handloom from Ancient Times to the Present*, New York 1979, p. 57.

⁵ See: A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans 1485-1897*, London 1969, pp. 206-7. The source is the French trader Landolphe, who was presented with such cloths by the Oba of Benin in 1778. Landolphe reported that these cloths were being woven by women in Benin on vertical looms.



7

The Yoruba

Among the Yoruba the users of the woman's vertical loom can be divided into two main groups. The first may perhaps be called the western Yoruba, that is to say a group including weavers in major cities like Ilorin, Ilesha and, though to a lesser degree, Ibadan, along with those in the surrounding countryside, and particularly in the villages around Omu-Aran. I have included under the heading of western Yoruba the Ijebu-Ode weavers, today much reduced in numbers but still an important component in the Yoruba weaving tradition. Our second main group is to be found in the neighbourhood of Ekiti and of Owo. While there are significant features of difference between weaving in these two places, yet similarities suffice to justify our treating them together.

Both the western Yoruba and the Ekiti-Owo group have much in common in the design of their looms and in their general operation. There are a number of variations in detail, however. In some Yoruba looms the lower horizontal beam is lashed directly to the uprights with the lashings passing round the uprights: in others, mainly looms located in towns as far east as Kabba, but not, however, in Ilorin, the uprights have holes drilled through them specially to provide extra points of attachment for the lashings of the horizontal beam. Some Yoruba looms have pits dug in the ground beneath their lower horizontal beams. When, as in Ado-Ekiti and Ido, the loom is located in the main room of a large house, one can find quite elaborate pits of size and shape such that they can accommodate several members of the family along with the weaver herself. In Ikerre I came across a number of old looms, now in the main disused, facing external house walls and

285 A typical Yoruba loom at Ilorin. Here the weaver usually sits on the floor to work.



286 A life-size statue in commemoration of the weavers at Ore.

provided with pits. In Owo I encountered loom pits which had been carefully concreted-in to become permanent house features.

The following are some names for looms and their related parts and accessories:

Western Yoruba

- ofi*—loom (either vertical or horizontal)
- igi ofi*—loom uprights
- porofi*—horizontal beams
- apasa*—sword
- asa*—heddle
- atu*—shuttle
- iye*—small bobbin
- kere*—spindle
- abisi*—shed stick
- akate ekowu*—skein winder, basket or cage type
- ika owu*—skein winder, cruciform type

Ekiti

- ofi*—loom
- igi iwole*—loom uprights
- gbogboro*—horizontal beams
- utu*—shuttle
- pankere*—rattan cane used for shuttle
- atita*—spreader
- obiri*—shed stick



287 A weaver at work in Ile-Mesi in western Yorubaland. The uprights here are made from a thorn tree called olosan. Note use of corn bobbins in the basket.

Hand spun cotton yarn is traditional among all the Yoruba weavers; but it has been to a great extent replaced by factory-made cotton among the western Yoruba. In the Ekiti and Owo districts, however, cloths made from hand spun cotton are of such ceremonial importance that a great deal of cotton spinning is carried on today and young girls are still being taught the craft. In Owo a considerable amount of cotton is grown to meet the demand created by the continued need for traditional cloths. In both Ekiti and Owo, moreover, great importance is attached to the dyeing of yarn with indigo, *aro*. Among the western Yoruba traces of the former extensive weaving of local silk, *sanyan*, can still be found. *Sanyan* is spun today in small quantities in Ilorin and Akure, on the basis of my own observation; but Akure was the only town I could find where it could be said that *sanyan* cloth was woven today on a significant scale, and then mainly to fill orders coming in from Lagos and Ibadan. Raffia, mixed with cotton, was once quite common in Yoruba weaving, to judge from the frequency with which it

occurs in the older cloths in European museums. Today the evidence suggests that it is only used on a significant scale by weavers in the Ekiti region as a component of baby ties. All the Yoruba groups make some use of synthetic yarns; and glittering linen thread is quite common.

The western Yoruba

There has been, it seems, a considerable decline in women's weaving here.¹ Only in Ilorin, in the Pakar district already referred to in connection with male weaving, can one find large numbers of women weavers. In the villages weaving does, of course, go on to some extent; but my own field work suggested that it was no longer a dominant craft. Normally weavers prefer to set up their looms in the privacy of their own rooms or some other interior part of the house. In Ilorin, however, one can find very many looms set up in verandahs of compounds, usually worked by young girls, often in sight not only of men weavers at their horizontal looms but also of passers by.

Weavers of the western Yoruba group tend to belong to families in which the women members have been engaged in the craft for many generations. As a result the craft is very much alive. Old designs may be woven to order side by side with experimental new varieties of pattern. Apart from that needed for



internal domestic use, most cloth is woven to special order. As with the Yoruba men weavers, women may receive orders for *aso ebi* cloth, that is to say for large numbers of cloths all of the same design and intended for some group ceremony where all present will be dressed alike. A certain amount of cloth, of course, does find its way to market. In one Ilorin household which I visited, the husband, who was also a weaver, took cloths from all the weavers in the compound, men and women, to the *Ojé* market. In another compound, however, I found that the custom was to dispose of cloths to a Hausa trader who sold them in markets in northern Nigeria.

The western Yoruba group of weavers produce a great variety of cloths which, for convenience, we may classify under six heads:

1. basic cloths with hand spun cotton
2. ceremonial cloths of traditional design
3. cloths replicating *aso oke* designs from the male horizontal loom
4. cloths using *sanyan*
5. baby ties
6. the Ijebu-Ode cloths

The basic cloths of hand spun cotton, used for everyday purposes, are usually known collectively as *aso ibile* or *aso ofi*, literally 'cloth of the region' or 'cloth of the loom'. They are also, in some places, called *kijipa* or *popofi*. The basic design components of these cloths are local hand spun cotton and indigo dye. The main emphasis is upon warp stripes, with weft striping possible but rather less common. The variations in width of stripe, in their arrangement, and in the depth of indigo blue, provide an almost infinite repertoire. A weaver may well give a particular design a name which strikes her imagination. Thus we find cloths called *epa* – 'groundnut', *eyire* – 'cricket', and *durotoko* – 'hold your husband well'.

The subject of ceremonial cloths and their use is indeed complex. There is much variation in designs between individual weavers, let alone places. In general, however, we can find three important categories, *olowududu*, *okun* and *oparo*.

Olowududu is the most important of these three, the

288 Left: A Yoruba hand spun cloth of the *kijipa* group. This particular cloth comes from Omu-Aran and is known as *agidi*. Sometimes used as a marriage cloth in the country.

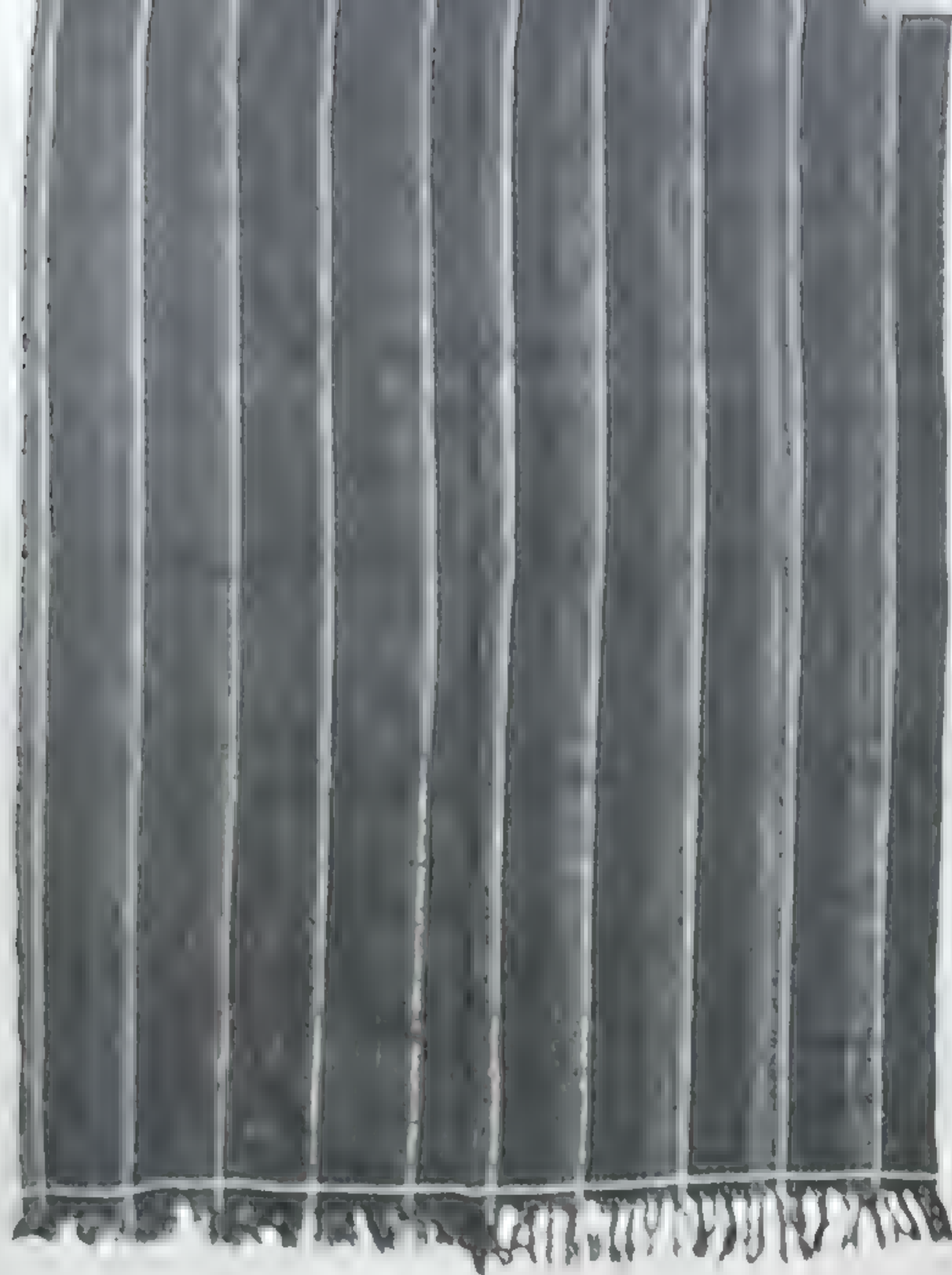
289 A large Yoruba *popofi* cloth showing one selvedge only decorated with a complex pattern of holes.



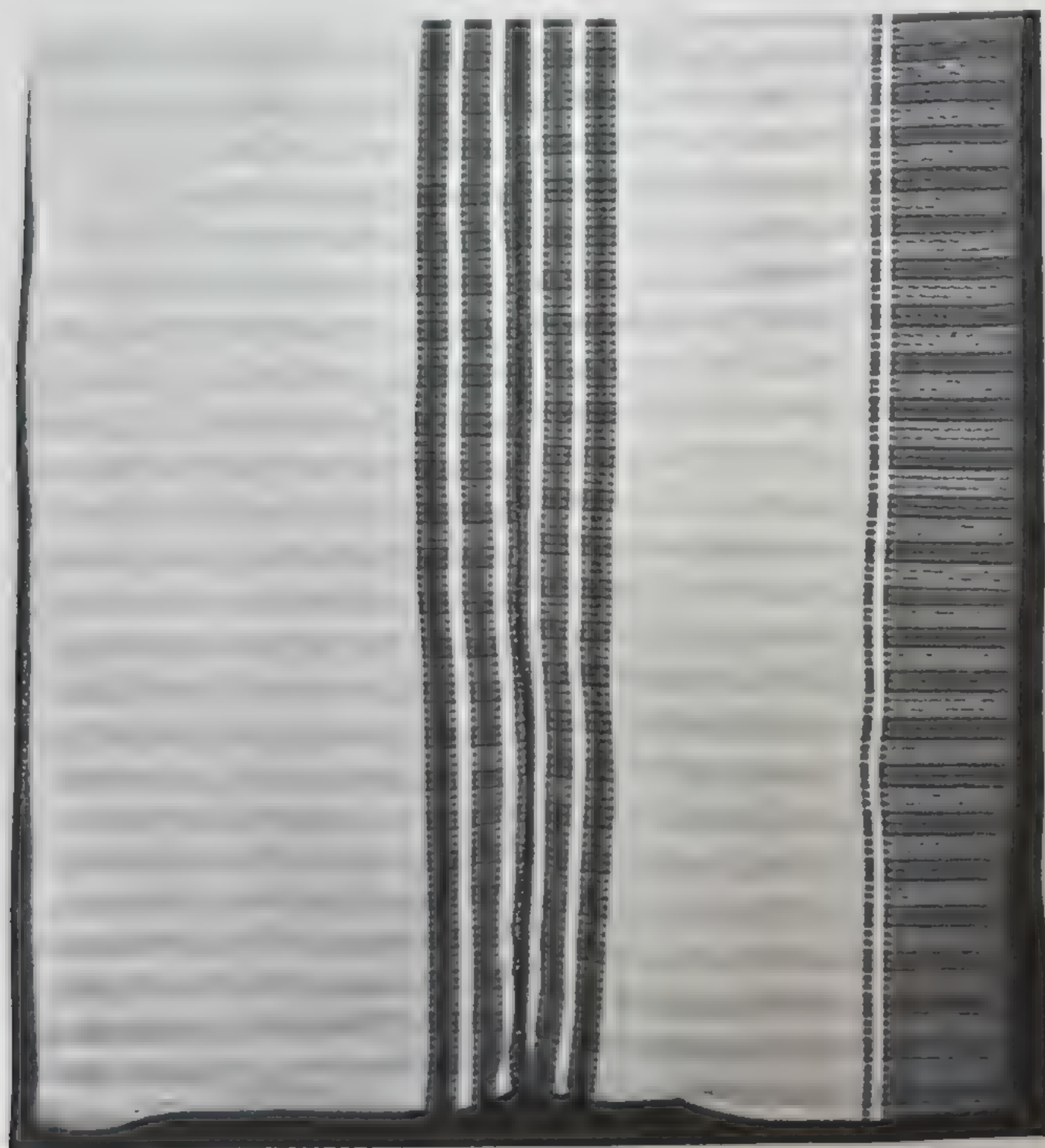
289 A Yoruba weaver discussing the importance of *olowududu* cloths, seen here displaying an example over her shoulder.



290



291 A Yoruba cloth from Ilorin from the oparo group of cloths, known as *eletu*. The selvedge and the light warp stripes are woven with magenta silk yarn.



292 *Elefi*, used as the second marriage cloth by the Yoruba in the Egbe region. Compare distribution of warp stripes with the *Ganagana* cloth on page 218. The hidden weft bands are similar to those seen in Owo and Ekiti cloths.

'king of cloths', ranking in Yoruba eyes along with the three major products of the horizontal loom, *etu*, *al*, and *sanyan*. The material is a very fine hand-spun cotton; and the characteristic which gives it its name is an indigo colour so dark as almost to be black, *dudu*. It is warped with a wide selvedge stripe as well as warp stripes of light blue and natural cotton. The finished cloth is beaten to give a distinctive sheen. The term *olowududu* can be used to refer either to a specific cloth or to a whole group of cloths.

Okun is a category of cloths used as bride gifts during the period of a marriage ceremony. There is a wide selvedge stripe and an arrangement of warp stripes in varying shades of indigo blue. The essential feature of the design is that the warp must contain a white stripe, today in cotton but formerly often in *sanyan*.

Oparo cloths from the vertical loom are very similar in design to cloths of the same name from the men's horizontal loom already referred to in Chapter 1.

Cloths play such an important role in marriage ceremonies that one should not be surprised to find a great variety among them in Yorubaland, which is after all of considerable area. In Egbe there is a marriage cloth called *elefi* which, on a white background, has a wide red selvedge stripe and hidden weft bands, and is quite unlike other Yoruba cloths, though with some parallels with cloths of the Nupe and Igbara.

Precious ceremonial cloths of the kinds mentioned above are never washed. They can be cleaned by being left out in the open to receive the morning dew and then to dry in the sun. They are folded and stored with great care. Unlike less valued cloths made from factory cotton, these cloths may have a very long life. A cloth of this category in the possession of a poorer person, who may own but a single example, will fade after repeated use. It may then be dyed black to become its owner's funeral cloth.

The designs of important cloths woven on the vertical loom may be copied or repeated in more commonplace cloths, usually woven today from factory-made yarn. To the inexperienced it may not always be too easy to tell an important cloth from a commonplace one. Women weavers may also copy designs from the narrow strip *aso oke* cloths woven by men. The whole range of *aso oke* patterning, including the use of *ikat* (*waka*), can be reproduced on the vertical loom, often so accurately that it requires careful examination to distinguish between the products of the two looms.



293 A fine cloth possibly from the region of Ekiti. Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.



294 A Yoruba marriage cloth called *okun*, woven in Ilorin and belonging to the *olowududu* group of cloths.



295 An old Yoruba cloth collected from Egga in 1841, of a type still seen in *Akoko* cloths today. British Museum, London.



296 An interesting old Yoruba cloth collected from Egga in 1841 which compares with the Ekiti cloth (293), using the hidden weft technique. British Museum, London.



297 A Yoruba weaver working on modern aso oke type patterns on the vertical loom. This practice of borrowing patterns from the horizontal loom is becoming quite prevalent today. Ilorin.

298 A pure silk Yoruba sanyan cloth from Ilorin, with ikat (waka) patterns. The right hand selvedge has groups of holes at intervals as an extra decoration.

298



300 A very old pure silk Yoruba cloth from Ondo. The warp consists of natural brown and white silk, crossed by a magenta silk alharini weft. Many holes have been woven in the wild silk weft spaces.

300



200

299 One of the few Yoruba silk spinners still working in Akure. She is wearing a fine example of woman's sanyan cloth.

Very few cloths today are woven on the vertical loom from the local Nigerian silk, *sanyan*; though the evidence of older cloths suggests that this material was quite widely used in the past. Those who today can afford *sanyan* cloth will usually have it made up from strips woven on the men's horizontal loom. Old wrappers of *sanyan* and woven on the vertical loom which I have seen incorporate both magenta threads of the *alaari* type as well as the use of decoration by means of holes, *eleya*. I have also seen *ikat* (*waka*) used in conjunction with *sanyan*.

Yoruba women place great importance on the use of handwoven cloth for baby ties, *oja*, those bands used to attach a baby securely to its mother's back. The more formal name for this category of cloth is *igbadiomo*. These baby ties consist of a single panel and can be decorated with a very wide range of patterns. Many *oja* have a centre portion with a tufted or pile texture. The use of this tufted surface is certainly associated with ritual and magical functions since it occurs in special cloths woven for cult societies such as the *Ogboni*, and it may be that these properties of tufted cloth are thought to be particularly suitable for the protection of babies. Tufted *oja* can be found on



302 A Yoruba cloth woven in Ijebu-Ode known as *aso oloye*. This is worn wrapped around the waist with the pattern at right angles to the ground.

303 A modern Yoruba cloth from Ijebu-Ode, woven with machine-spun yarns. The patterns are traditional and include the *opolo-agery*—'frog without a tail', at the bottom; *fowo boju*—'hand washing the face', third panel up; and, fifth panel, *oni*—'the crocodile'. 304 An *itagbe* cloth worn by Chiefs of the *Ogboni* society in Ijebu-Ode. The important features of this cloth are the tufted portions (*shaki*).

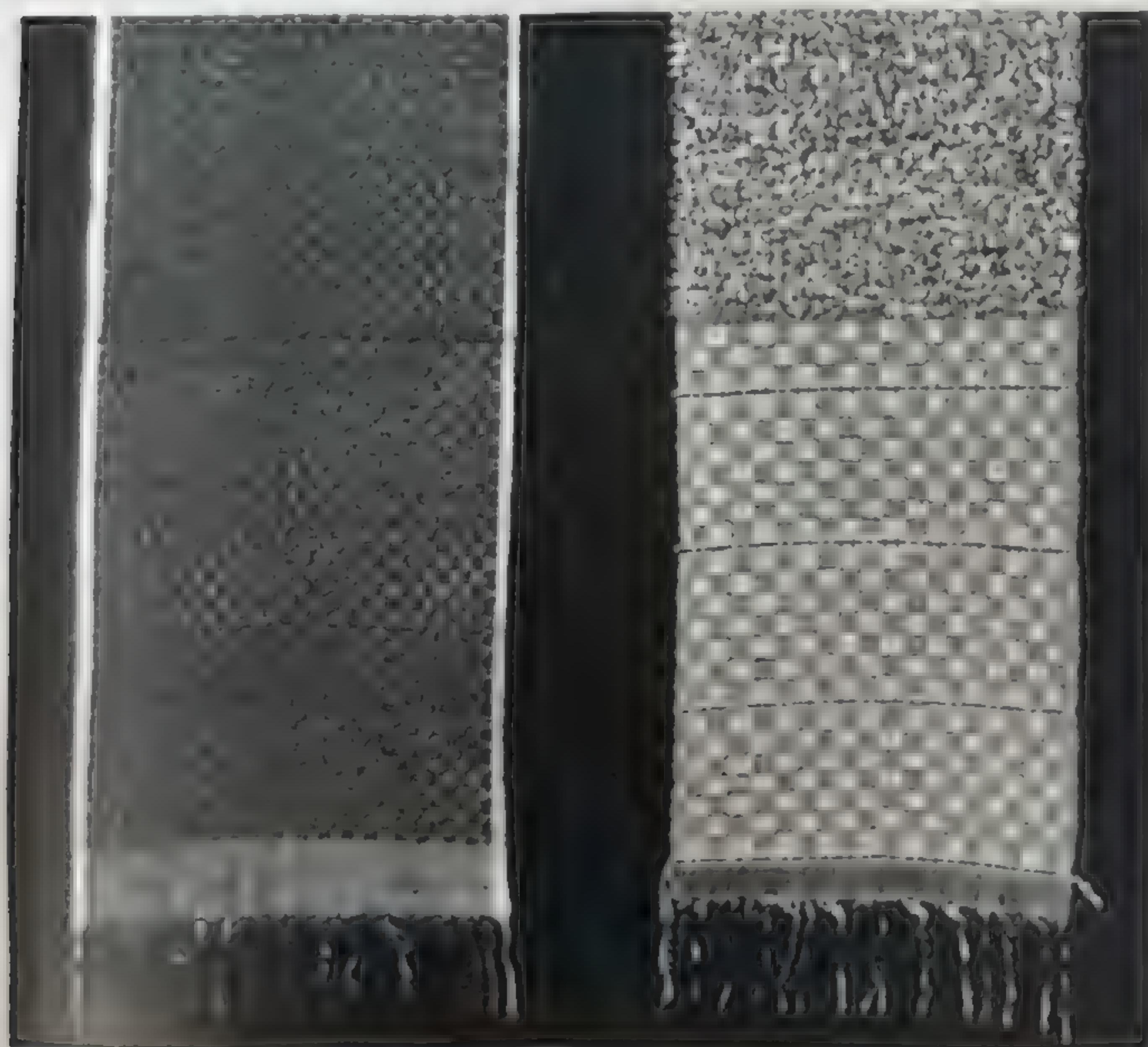
303



304



301 Two types of Yoruba basket weave, known as *egba kahun*—'the tortoise shell' in Ilorin, left, and *ijapa*—'the tortoise' in Ekiti, right.



301



sale in markets in virtually all parts of Nigeria. In its ceremonial aspect, tufted cloth can be called *shaki*.

The home of *shaki* is probably Ijebu-Ode. This was once an important weaving centre. Today there are relatively few weavers there, but the cloth that they produce is of particular importance, for they weave *itagbe* cloths worn by Chiefs in connection with the ceremonial of some cult societies of the *Ogboni* type. *Itagbe* cloths often combine tufts, *shaki*, with a highly stylized inlay pattern involving diamond and comb motifs. The basic pattern is called *oni*, 'crocodile', and variations or derivations of it occur in cloths produced by all the Nigerian women's weaving groups who use inlay designs. A typical *itagbe* cloth will have alternate bands of *shaki* tufts and *oni* inlay, and the ends of the cloth, which consists of but one panel, are elaborately finished off with tassels which make use of part of the web as well as unwoven warp ends. Indeed, to help make these tassels, a series of slits are specially woven into each end of the panel. The *itagbe* cloth is worn across the shoulder like some kind of formal sash.

The slits woven into the ends of *itagbe* cloths from Ijebu-Ode are, in fact, variations of the technique of using holes for decoration, known as *eleya* or, in Ilorin, as *oniho*. This type of patterning is to be found in many cloths woven by Yoruba women. The technique is old: it is well represented in the cloths collected at Egga in 1841 and now in London. One method of weaving these holes involves the use of extra weft threads which are carried over the surface of the web from one line of holes to the next, a type of patterning well known in *aso oke* cloth from Yoruba male horizontal looms. It is known as *oja owu*, 'threads will be cut'.

Modern Nigerian markets abound with factory-produced cloth, and such cloth is worn by the majority of people at market, be they men or women. It is not easy to appreciate that in many rural areas until very recently the basic family wardrobe would depend not on this machine-made cloth but on the product of the vertical loom. A woman could, and was expected to be able to, weave clothing not only for herself but also for her children and for her husband to wear about the house. Her own dress could consist of a *yeri*, a single-panelled undergarment, over which would be an *iro* or *irobirin*, a two-panelled wrapper tied beneath the arms. As a married woman she would also have an *iborun*, a single-panelled or double-panelled cloth

305 Chief Ojigbo Aderounmu of Owo, wearing his ceremonial cloths. These consist of two hand spun cloths: the *igbero* incorporating ikat designs, and the *olowojokolagi* top cloth.



306 A Yoruba weaver in Ijebu-Ode working on the traditional patterns, but using modern synthetic yarns. Only a few weavers are keeping these patterns alive today.

307 A chief from Benin wearing his *Ogboni* society regalia, which includes an *itagbe* upper wrapper, woven in Ijebu-Ode.





which can be worn over the shoulder or as an additional wrapper over the *irobirin*. On her head she could wear a *gele*, a single panel worn as a head tie, and her baby would be attached to her back by an *oja*, yet another single panel. Her daughter, at least until puberty, would wear a *yeri* alone. Her husband, for use around the house, would have a three panelled *aso ibora okurin*; and he might use another such cloth as a cover at night. For formal occasions, she might have made for him a more elaborate over-garment made from no less than four panels. Her vertical loom, apart from these, could in fact produce material for almost any garment for which a need was felt.

Today in many roles the product of the vertical loom has had to compete both with the factory and the product of the male horizontal loom. Early in this century the *buba*, or blouse, became an integral part of women's attire; and this is rarely made from hand-woven cloth. In the towns the wrapper now is more likely to be *aso oke* from the horizontal loom. Orders, however, are still placed for women weavers to produce a complete outfit, collectively *ode kan* or *toke tile*, consisting of *irobirin*, *iborun* and *gele*, all of panels of slightly different dimensions. The set may be of matching design, or the *gele* may differ from the others. There is certainly room in the arranging of such an order for a great deal of thought and discussion.

In certain ritual and ceremonial aspects of Yoruba life, however, the older cloth types still retain a considerable degree of importance. Special cloths are called for at weddings, child namings and burials. It was traditional for a bride to take with her to her new home seven cloths, of which at least one was of the *olowududu* type; and such cloths could be handed down over the generations. The tradition still exerts its hold, but it is clearly weakening. In one Yoruba town I asked a group of women of various ages what was the most important of their marriage cloths. The older women all said it was *olowududu*. Most of the women of the middle age group told me that their cloths had been of the old designs but woven from factory-made yarn. The youngest said that their cloths were *aso oke*; and the unmarried girls declared that they would prefer *aso oke*.

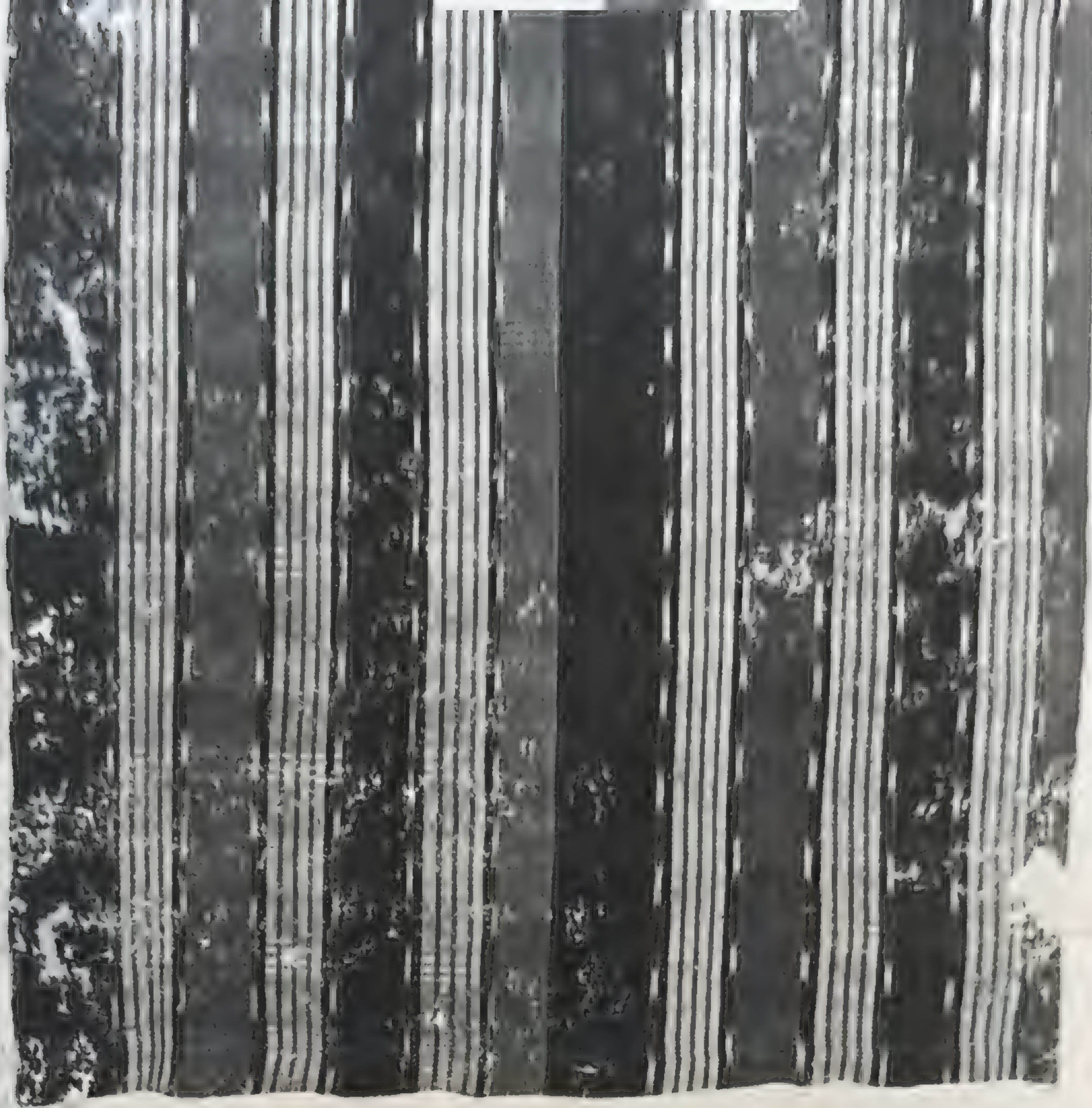
In the traditional life of a woman cloth has a final role as a burial cloth. A special cloth, always made of hand spun cotton, will be chosen for this purpose. It

may be one of her marriage cloths, or it may have been specially woven. If there is no prized cloth available, an old cloth of hand spun cotton, sometimes bought in the market for this purpose, will be made to do by being dyed as black as possible.

309 Two Yoruba cloth traders in Ore, wearing second-hand redyed *kijipa* cloths and new *iborun* shawls over their shoulders



308 A large assortment of Yoruba *oja* cloths for sale in the *Oja Ala* market in Ilorin. They are used mainly as baby ties and represent the largest portion of women's cloths for sale in this market.



The Ekiti and the Owo

Ekiti and Owo lie between, on the west, the old Yoruba kingdoms and, on the east, the lands of the Edo, Igala and Igbira. Weavers are to be found in small numbers in most of the towns and villages around Ekiti; but in Owo they are more or less confined to the town itself.

One can see, today, large numbers of disused looms in houses in Ekiti, creating an impression of a weaving craft in decline. In fact, locally woven cloth on the vertical loom, using hand spun cotton, is still of great cultural importance to the Ekiti, who do not seem to have attached particular significance to the output of the male horizontal loom. Cloth woven by women is used today, as it was in the past, by both men and women for ceremonial and traditional occasions.

These occasions call for special cloths, traditionally of hand spun cotton and coloured deep indigo blue, and natural unbleached cotton. They can be made up from one, two or three panels. Single panel cloths can be worn as shoulder cloths. The major significance lies in the two-panel cloths, *ikeji*, and three-panel cloths, *iketa*, the names simply referring to the number of panels. *Iketa* cloths, with three panels, are used by

men, while *ikeji* cloths, with two panels, are for both men and women. *Iketa* cloths, however, can also serve as shrouds for both sexes.

There are three main types of *iketa*: *gandaro*, woven especially for a Chief or other person of rank or importance; *aso ala*, 'white cloth', of considerable religious importance; and the humble house cloth.

Gandaro cloths, with the traditional colour repertoire of blue and white, may be extremely austere in their patterning. One form is a very dark blue background with white warp stripes spaced a foot or more apart regularly across the web. The cloth is beaten to give it texture and glaze. The deeper the dye and the simpler the design the greater the cloth's importance. In recent years Ekiti Chiefs have taken, on occasion, to wearing *gandaro* cloths made of factory cotton which use chemical black dye instead of indigo; and simple inlay floats of a type copied from the Igbira may be incorporated into the design. The *gandaro* of factory cotton are lighter and hence both cooler and more comfortable, which helps explain their popularity.

White *iketa* cloth, *aso ala*, is worn by participants in many religious festivals. One of the songs traditional to the Osanyin festival among the Ekiti refers specifically to *aso ala*: 'help me to carry, father, let the Orisha worshippers carry white cloth'.² In the annual *Olosunta Amoye Eleyo* ('Festival of the Rocks') in Ikerre-Ekiti priests appear clad in *aso ala*. An *aso ala* cloth can also be woven specifically to be used as a shroud, and in some Ekiti towns the older people will have such a cloth either stored or used for the time being as a cover. In some places an *aso ala* shroud may be woven after the death has taken place. *Aso ala* cloth, moreover, is available in some markets for those who have not made their own. In a traditional Ekiti burial ceremony *aso ala* has a role to play as a dress of mourning; if the participants cannot afford an entire cloth they may wear a small square of white hand spun cotton cloth attached to their outer garments.

Ikeji, the two-panel cloth, is used both by men and women. Two special types are woven for men. One uses a basket weave pattern called *ijapa*, 'tortoise', and

311 An elaborate *olowojokolagi* cloth from Owo. This cloth is enhanced by the addition of holes at the selvedges woven with purple wefts and an overall hidden weft known as *oshan* in Owo.



312 A spinner from Igbara-Oke, near Ekiti, wearing an *olowojokolagi* cloth.

the other has two-thread warp stripes and an inlay design called *oloponyo* which is similar to, and probably derived from, the *oni* design of the Ijebu-Ode cloths. *Ikeji* cloths can be worn by both women and men for ceremonial and everyday purposes. Those intended for important ceremonies tend, as in the *iketa* cloth of the *gandarò* type, to depend for their effect upon simplicity of warp stripe and darkness of the dye colour. Good examples of these ceremonial or important *ikeji* cloths are *igbalode*, a name which also refers to the head of a women's society, and *alagaletu* (meaning something like, 'the rich wear the best cloth') the *etu* element of the name being, perhaps, a reference to the important cloth of that name woven by men on the horizontal loom. *Ikeji* cloth intended for everyday use is generally referred to as *toyola*, and it may well today be woven from factory-made cotton. Many of these cloths have hidden weft bands, which appear to be a special feature of Ekiti and Owo cloths. *Ikeji* cloths of the *toyola* variety quite often used to incorporate *ikat* (*adita* in Ekiti) warp designs; but these are now very rare, being considered old-fashioned.

Ikeji cloths with particular warp stripe arrangements



313 Twins from Owo wearing two important cloths. On the right is the *egbonro*—'brother wait' pattern and on the left is the *egunulu*—'bone country' design.

are woven for use by members of women's societies at their meetings. Age sets (*egbe*), associations of workers in a craft, gatherings of herbal doctors—all these are examples of groups or occasions which could call for the use of a specially designed *ikeji* cloth. The herbal doctors might also wear a tufted cloth of the *shaki* type, draped over one shoulder, such as we noted from Ijebu-Ode. The predominant colour of these cloths is white with a red and green pattern. The fringes can incorporate cowrie shells.

Other single-panel cloths woven in the Ekiti region are baby ties, *oja*, usually woven in that basket weave called *ijapa*, 'tortoise', which we have already noted as a possible feature of *ikeji* two-panelled cloths. Most *ijapa* designs are executed in the old manner, involving the use of light and dark blue threads. Today, however, some weavers have added variety to this design by using new colours and different warp counts. *Oja* are the most common cloths to be found in Ekiti markets.

Owo cloth has a great deal in common with cloth from Ekiti, *ikeji* and *iketa* cloths being woven in much the same style and there being a similar use of *aso ala*. The main difference between Owo and Ekiti lies in the alignments of warp stripes. In Owo one can see a dominance of white warp stripes in the important cloths which, today, are still in the main woven from hand spun cotton except for the white threads which are now factory made. We identified a number of interesting Owo *iketa* cloths, among them the following: *olwojokolagi*, 'man who sits on top of a chair has money', a pattern reserved for Chiefs and important persons; *egunulu*, 'bone country'; *egbonro*, 'brother wait', with thin indigo stripes on a white ground and hidden weft bands, *oshan*. A number of Owo patterns are reserved for Chiefs and the like. One has already been noted, *olwojokolagi*. In general *ikeji* cloth of red handspun cotton and incorporating *ikat* design is reserved for Chiefs. Most cloths, however, can be worn both by men and by women. During age set ceremonies it is common to find all of one group wearing the same pattern.

A most interesting cloth woven in Owo is *sewosen*. It is very much prized, costs a great deal, and not all weavers know how to make it. The name *sewosen* means 'reward for youthful toil', and the cloth does seem to be rather the preserve of older people, though

314 A loom with a pit in Owo. The loom uprights here are placed outside the pit, unlike other Yoruba looms with pits.



315 Yoruba sewosen cloth from Owo, rather like Indian brocade.

there are special cases where it is worn by the young. The *sewosen* design is a complicated inlay, usually on a red ground. There is but one basic pattern consisting of an array of diamond-shaped inlay motifs covering the whole cloth with the exception of border bands. This is the only cloth woven by the Ekiti and the Owo which involves the use of supplementary heddles; and the pattern is quite unlike anything else that I have seen in Nigeria. The over all effect is more Asian than African. One could easily take *sewosen* to be some kind of Indian brocade. The fact that it is both atypical of Owo and Ekiti weaving and has no special ritual importance to the Owo and the Ekiti rather suggests that it is, in fact, an innovation. One possibility is that some enterprising weaver derived the design from an actual specimen of Indian or other imported cloth. The use of supplementary heddles could well have been inspired by Igbera weavers settled around Owo or, even, by the example of practice in Okene.

Owo cloth is by no means easy to study as very little finds its way to market other than the occasional *oja*. Owo weavers work either to special order or they dispose of their cloths by direct sales to households. There remains a good demand for traditional cloths because of their continued employment in major rituals such as the Ero festival, and in naming and burial ceremonies.

Notes

¹ In 1936, for example, Murray noted many women weavers at Omu-Aran. My own investigations in Omu-Aran in 1978 and 1979 suggested that weaving had virtually ceased in this place. See: K. C. Murray, 'Women's weaving among the Yorubas of Omu-aran in Ilorin Province', *Nigerian Field*, 1936.

² See: J. R. O. Ojo, 'Amurun Yanyan, an Osanyin Festival in a small Ekiti Town', *Nigeria Magazine*, 121, 1976.

The Nupe, the northern Igbira and associated peoples

This chapter discusses weavers from a number of different, but interrelated, groups including the Nupe, the Ganagana, the Gede, the northern Igbira and some Hausa. Nupe women weavers, apart from Bida and its outlying villages, can be found in Jebba Island on the Niger, and in Mokwa and Kutigi. The Ganagana are mainly to be seen in and around Abuja, Onda and the surrounding villages between Toto and Nasarawa. The northern Igbira weave in many of the towns and villages between Koton-Karifi and Abuja including, in particular, the Abaji region. Many women among both the Gede and the settled Hausa in Keffi are weavers who have developed a cloth genre of their own. The common factors between these weaving groups are not always too specific. They do, however, employ very similar warp alignments in their patterning; they use much the same kind of inlay design; and most of them use special marriage cloths of the kind known as *duna*.

The Nupe

According to Nadel the craft of weaving among the Nupe was restricted to the upper classes.¹ He added that the craft was not traditional to the Nupe but had reached them by way of the Yoruba through both slaves and intermarriage. In Nadel's day (the 1930s) poorer Nupe women did not, on the whole, weave. Today, however, the situation is different. My own field work suggested that the use of the vertical loom was widely diffused among the Nupe. There is some evidence, however, to confirm Nadel's argument that the craft was acquired fairly recently by the Nupe. It may be significant, for example, that cloth woven on the vertical loom enjoys no special ritual or ceremonial significance among the Nupe, a significance which one



316 A Nupe loom in Bida, seen here inside a house compound

might expect to find associated with a craft of great antiquity and tradition. Moreover, most of the terms used by the Nupe for their weaving equipment and the like appear to be of Yoruba or Hausa origin. The Nupe for sword, for example, *akpase*, must surely be related to the Yoruba *apasa*. On the other hand, cloth woven in Nupe tends to be somewhat wider than that woven elsewhere, which suggests that the craft has undergone some local evolution.

The Nupe loom is of more or less standard size; but the beams may be more massive than those found elsewhere and, in older looms at least, may have elaborately carved decoration. The uprights are generally made from a thorn tree, *quaci*. The Nupe sword, made from a local wood called *lopa*, has a handle of characteristic carved design. Nupe looms are to be found only within the depths of house compounds, either in individual rooms or along verandahs in inner courtyards. In a weaving household nearly every woman member will be a weaver with a loom of her own. The craft is carried on here in a manner somewhat more leisurely than is general elsewhere, but it is undoubtedly thriving. It was rare in 1978 and 1979 to find a loom not being currently in use. Skills were still being handed down from mother to daughter, a process which appeared to have been little affected by the demands of schooling. Apart from a

317 Detail of a decorative Nupe sword handle, and an upright loom beam in Bida, with carved decoration.



318 *Salu*, a fine Nupe marriage cloth, classified as second in importance after the *duna* cloth. The tiny zigzag embellishments are called *amabata*.

319 A Nupe cloth called *yarangi*, popular with the elderly today.



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few older women, however, the related craft of spinning seemed to have all but disappeared. Indeed, today one of the most characteristic features of Nupe weaving, especially in Bida, is the use of extremely high quality factory-made yarn, which in turn contributes to the quality of Bida cloth.

The Nupe weave cloths with two distinct systems of patterning, one based on warp alignments and the other on inlay. Both types usually employ factory-spun cotton yarn. The use of float inlay would seem to be an innovation of comparatively recent date, the more traditional inlay being confined to a small zig-zag motif, *amabata*, used as a chain running along the warp near the selvedge. Nupe cloths in general are remarkable for their subtle use of colour unique in the repertoire of the Nigerian vertical loom.

The main use for Nupe cloth is as women's wrappers, *edepka*. Cloths suitable for *edepka* are graded into a hierarchy according to criteria based on over all colour and pattern effect. The order is as follows: *duna*, *salu*, *yarangi*, *ekwaeko*, *ashawu*, and *indadogi*.

Duna, which is recognized by all the weavers covered in this chapter, and not only the Nupe, as being a cloth of special importance, will be discussed separately. It is, in any case, significantly different from the rest of the Nupe cloths.

Salu is a cloth type which might perhaps have taken

The Nupe, the northern Igbira and associated peoples

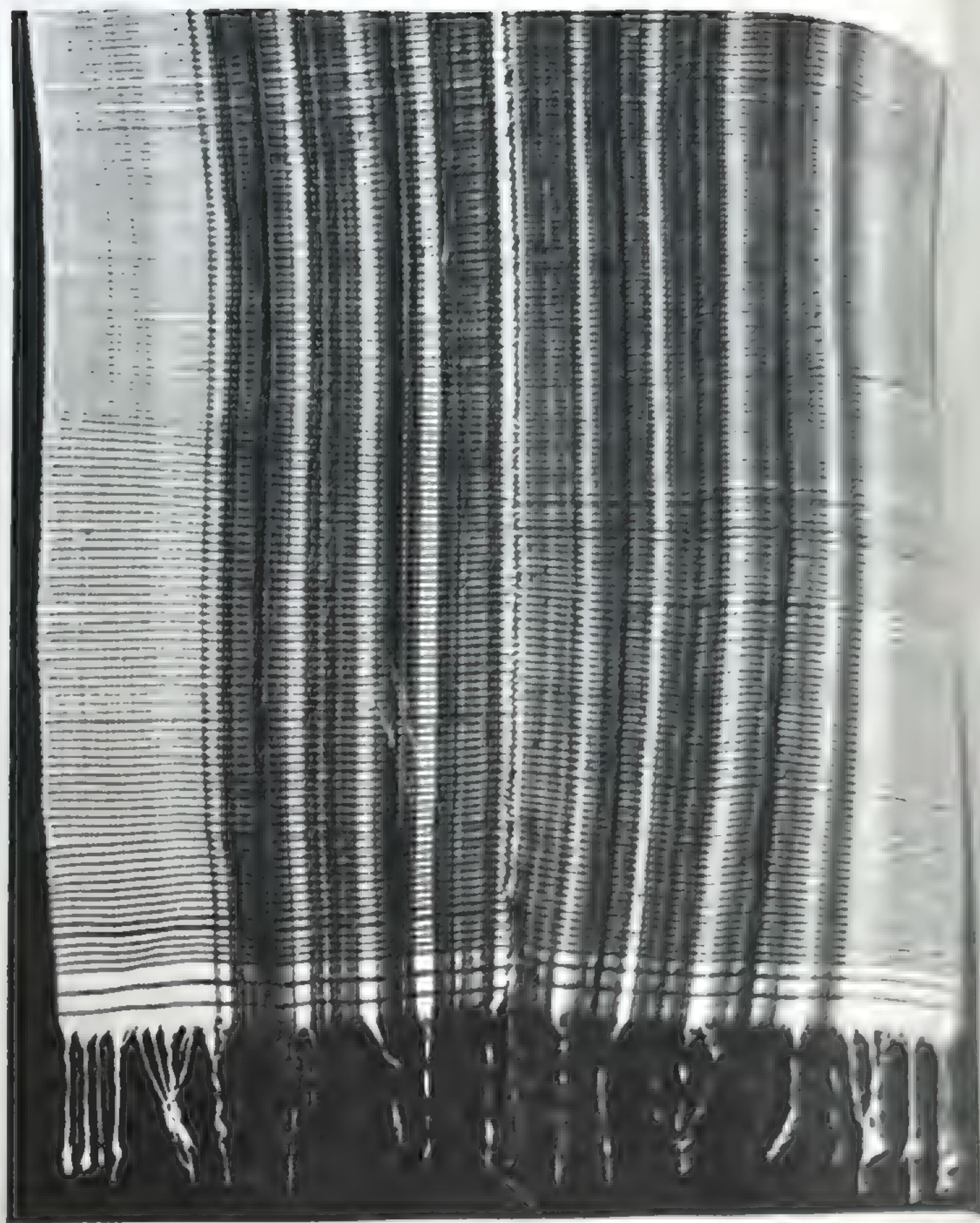
its name from the Yagba town of that name to the south of the Niger. The traditional form of *salu* is predominantly red with a plain wide selvedge stripe followed by alternate narrow red and blue stripes to which a green stripe must be added.

Yarangi, a cloth associated with the elderly, is an orange and red cloth with a wide orange selvedge stripe.

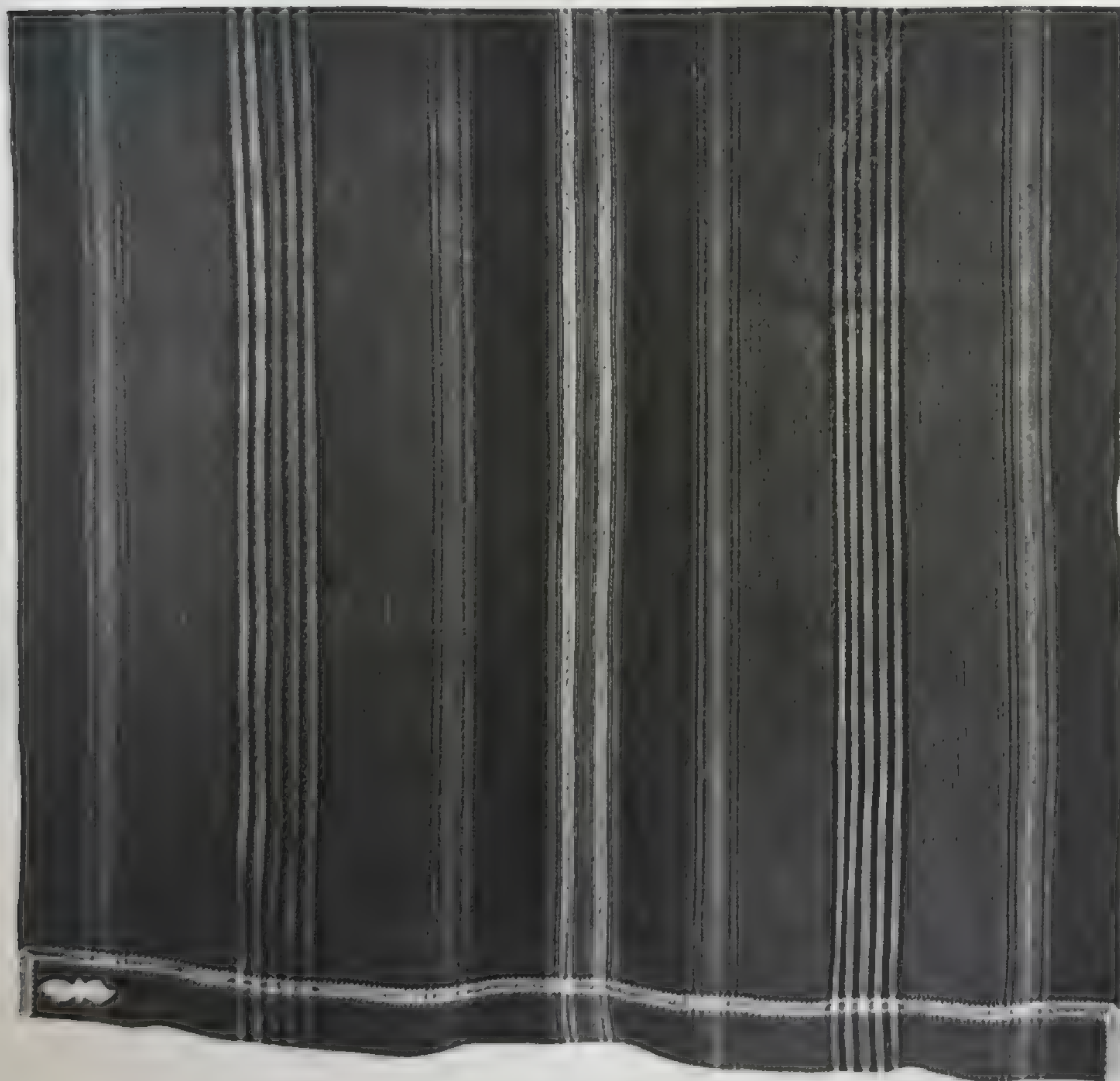
Ekwaeko, 'native tea', has an over all purple effect obtained by the use of alternate red and blue threads to which blue, red and green stripes are added. This cloth is sometimes woven with a hand spun cotton weft.

Ashawu has a maroon border and ground with orange and blue stripes. The weft is black. In contrast to other Nupe cloths, the over all effect lacks lustre.

Indadogi, traditionally, has a white selvedge, black and white stripes and hidden weft bands. Stripes and bands of bright colours, however, can be added to produce a much gayer effect. The basic *indadogi* design has been the subject of much experiment in recent years by younger weavers to produce cloths in which the *indadogi* origin may not be easy to discern.



321 A cloth for daily wear, the Nupe indadogi pattern. Bida.



320 A Nupe wrapper called *ekwaeko*, woven with very good quality factory spun yarns. Bida.

322 Nupe basket weave known *egokpara*—'the scales of a fish'.



Apart from warp stripes, weft bands and inlay, the Nupe also use other patterning methods such as *ikat*, which they call *ekogi bishi*, and a kind of basket weave, *egokpara* ('scales of a fish'). Nupe cloths from Bida are quite often decorated with embroidery, usually as a border at one end. The weaver does not do the embroidering, which is man's work. Most embroidery now is by machine using nearly always yellow thread.

Cloth woven for men on the vertical loom in Nupe is called *edekakpa*, and consists of three panels to make up a garment worn about the house. The colour is usually white or faint blue with stripe patterns called *waya*, 'lines'. *Edekakpa* cloths can be used as marriage cloths, as, for example, gifts to the bridegroom by his father. Such cloths can have elaborate striping and inlay.

Formerly, Nupe weavers produced a cloth of hand spun cotton called *bunuzhiko*, 'a cloth bought to take away', with indigo blue and natural cotton colour. This is no longer produced. The only all hand spun cotton Nupe cloth today is *kpasa*, used as underclothing by the elderly.

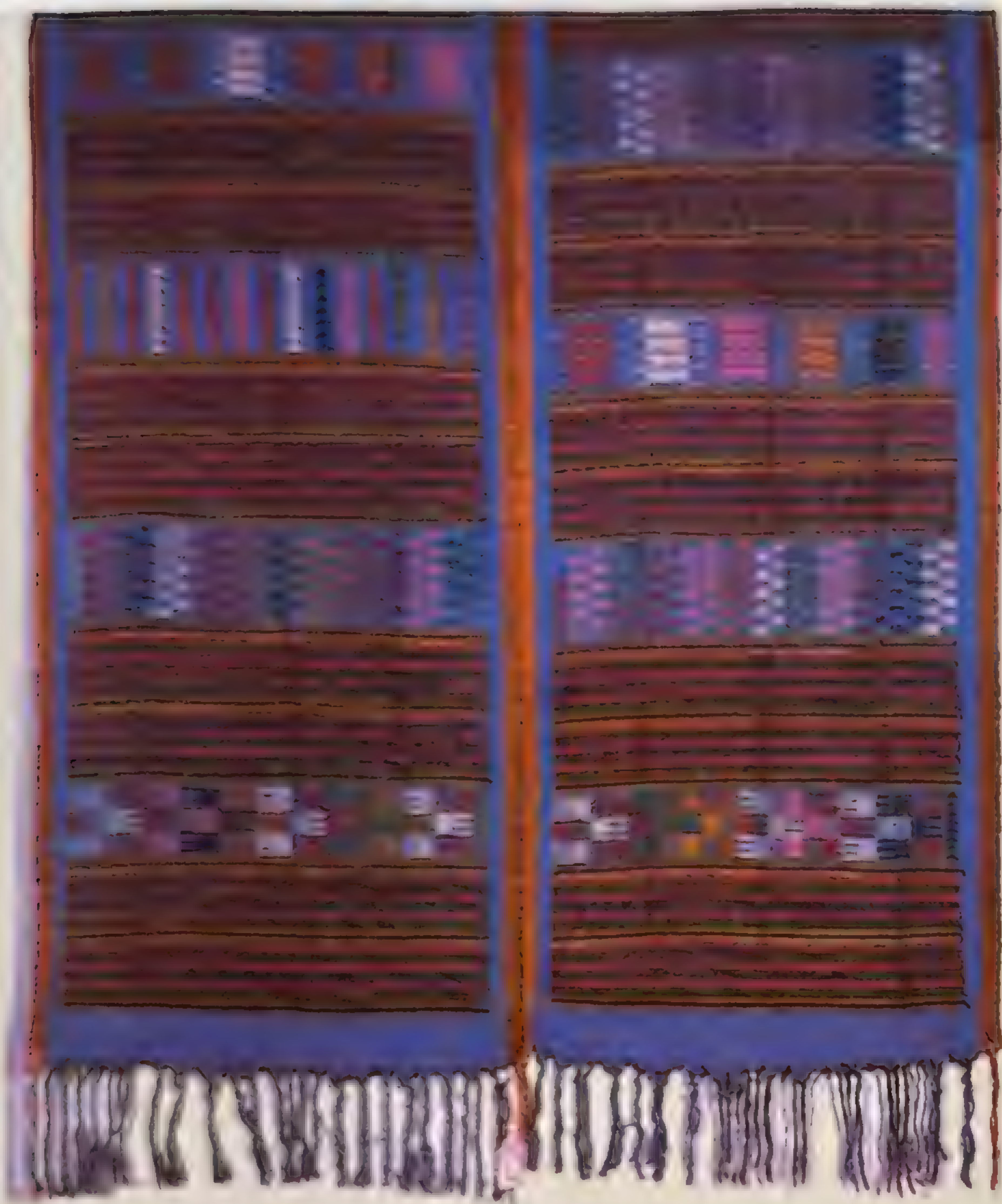
While not of ritual importance to the Nupe in a

323 Alhaji Abraham Abubakar of Bida wearing his *edekakpa* cloth called *waya*—'lines'.



324 A duna cloth woven by a northern Igbira woman in Ahoko, near Koton Karifi. The central block pattern represents the *mashalashi* 'mosque' motif. 325 An older type of duna cloth called *duna bakum*, being a white duna from Bida. The distribution of the bold inlay is the main characteristic of the duna group.





229 A small Nupe cloth market inside the compound of Alhaji Abraham Abubakar. Many neighbouring weavers sell their cloth in this way.

326 A modern Nupe duna cloth from Bida. Under the bold inlay patterns can always be seen the tiny warp stripe ground weave—a common feature of all duna cloth.



327 A cloth from Nasarawa which clearly falls into the duna group of patterns.

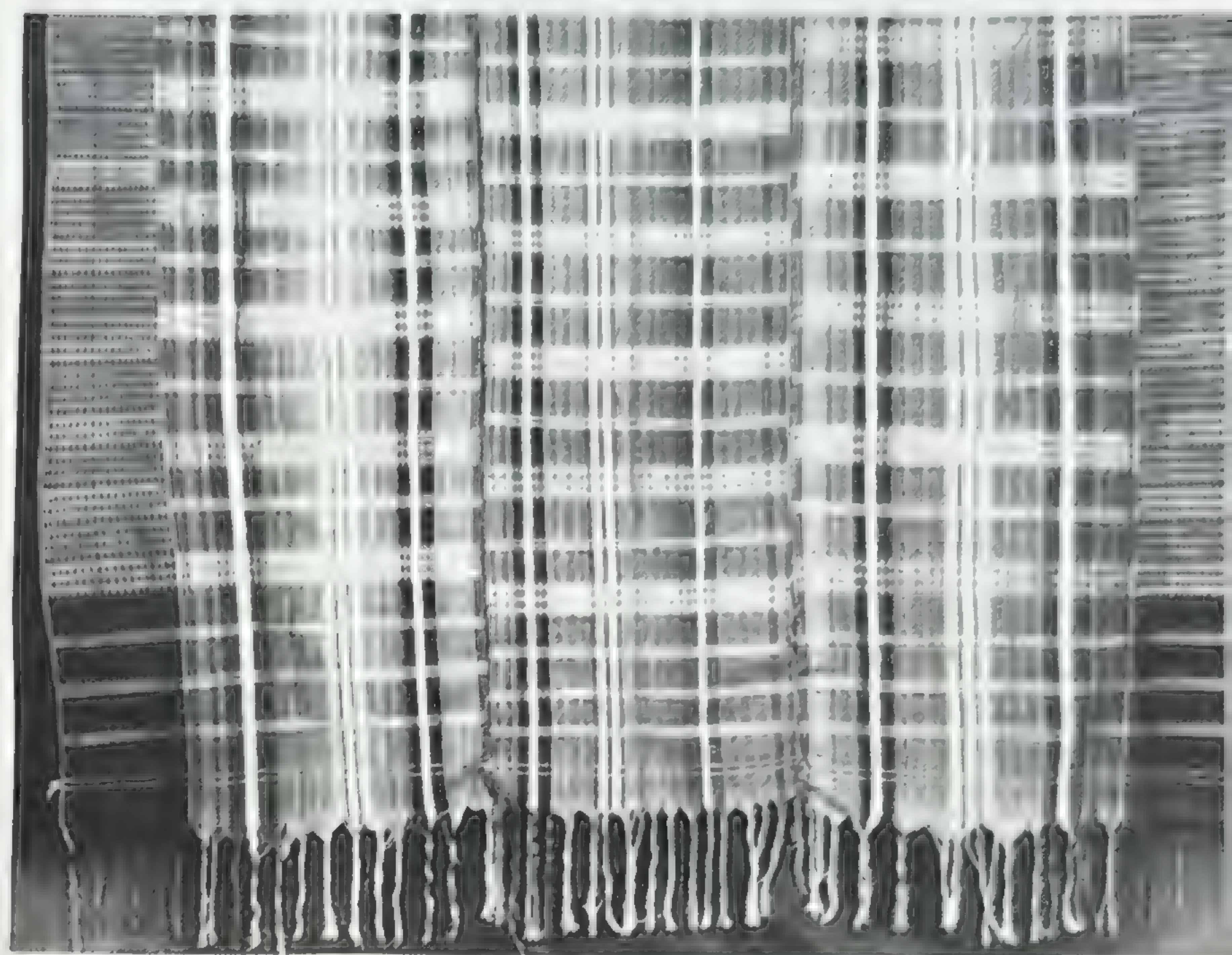


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spiritual sense, yet cloths do play an important part in marriage ceremonies as essential gifts. Nadel observed that a Nupe bride required before marriage 'cloths sufficient to last her for the first four or five years of marriage'.² These had to be provided by the bride's father. On the basis of considerable questioning in Bida I established that a Nupe bride required to have in her dowry examples of three specific cloths, *duna*, *yarangi* and *ashawu*. To these the bride can add other cloths according to her own taste; and these can either be handwoven or factory made. In some rural areas of Nupe the required cloths were reduced to two with the omission of *duna*, which was considered too expensive.

Nupe cloth is sold both in the compound and in the market. Weavers usually deal with certain traders, who can be either men or women, who call regularly at the compound and take surplus cloths to market. Bida market has a great deal of local cloth for sale, each piece carefully folded for both protection and some display of warp pattern. As elsewhere in Nigeria, much of the best quality cloth in Bida never passes through the market but is distributed by direct transaction between weaver and customer.

The Nupe take considerable care in the finishing of



329 A Nupe edekakpa, a three-panelled man's cloth, often used as a marriage cloth.

their cloths. Some, as has already been noted, have embroidered ends. Most cloths are hemmed or, where a fringe is desired, provided with a pleat at either end across the warp which serves as a hem while not interfering with the free-warp tassels.

Duna cloth

Duna is quite different from other cloths woven in Nupe. It is, moreover, held to be important by other peoples, Ganagana and northern Igbira, for instance, some of whom also weave it. It can be worn by both men and women, in the male version usually with three panels and in the female form with two panels.

Duna cloths have two distinct features. First, the background is broken up by a regular array of thin warp stripes, each of one or two threads, about a quarter of an inch apart. Second, on this background is woven a sequence of extremely bold and distinctive inlay designs. The background traditionally can be either blue or white. On a blue background, the inlay is usually red or green; on a white background, black may be added to these colours. Some parts of the design seem to be governed by strict canon while others are left to the customer's choice. The criteria for



330 A northern Igbira bride from Toto, wearing her duna cloth.

essential design, however, vary from place to place and over the years. *Duna* has changed greatly in many respects over the last thirty or forty years. Modern *duna* contains colours other than the traditional reds and greens, and it exploits the possibilities of shiny synthetic yarns. *Duna* cloths, in other words, are subject to fashion. In 1978 and 1979 a design called *nowaedin*, with a warp of purplish effect, was particularly popular. Some modern *duna* cloths are sold in the market as 'Bida cloths', a fact which has served somewhat to confuse the classification of cloths woven in Nupe.

The traditional Nupe preference has been for the *duna* cloth with white background, *duna bakun*. Among the northern Igbira, on the other hand, the emphasis is on *duna* cloth woven on a blue ground. Here, too, fashion exerts its influence. The northern Igbira today (1979) place particular value on a pattern of Islamic significance, *mashalashi* ('mosque'), consisting of dense blocks of tiny triangles.

Duna cloths are usually woven by specialists, as one might expect with patterning of this complexity. In any given area there will be but one or two such specialists who might well not be natives of the region. At Ahoko, near Abaji, I met one such specialist, Madame Asatu Umorko, who most kindly spent much time explaining her craft to me. She had been taught

by her mother, who was an Igala; and she was, in turn, instructing her daughters. She worked only to order. It took her between ten and twelve days to complete a panel. She had more orders than she could easily meet. As she said, among some people, the Igbira Igu and Igbira Pandu for example, *duna* was an essential marriage cloth and most women in the region either possessed such a cloth or, at least, were members of families owning a *duna*. If it is financially impossible to acquire a new *duna* for a bride, then she will be provided with an old one by a relative, so that she does not arrive at her new home without some specimen of this essential marriage cloth.

The weaving of *duna* involves processes which we have not encountered elsewhere in our study of the vertical loom in Nigeria. A weaver could well travel far from her own home to learn the craft, and then travel again to find a place in which to practise it. One consequence is that it has proved difficult to pinpoint the region of origin of this cloth. In the *duna* inlay designs we can detect parallels with both Ijebu-Ode and Akwete; and it may well be that from Ijebu-Ode, one of the oldest centres in Nigeria of weaving on the vertical loom, pattern influences made their way via Akwete to the northern Igbira and the Nupe, and that the *duna* cloths today are evidence of the past operation of this process of both diffusion and evolution in design.

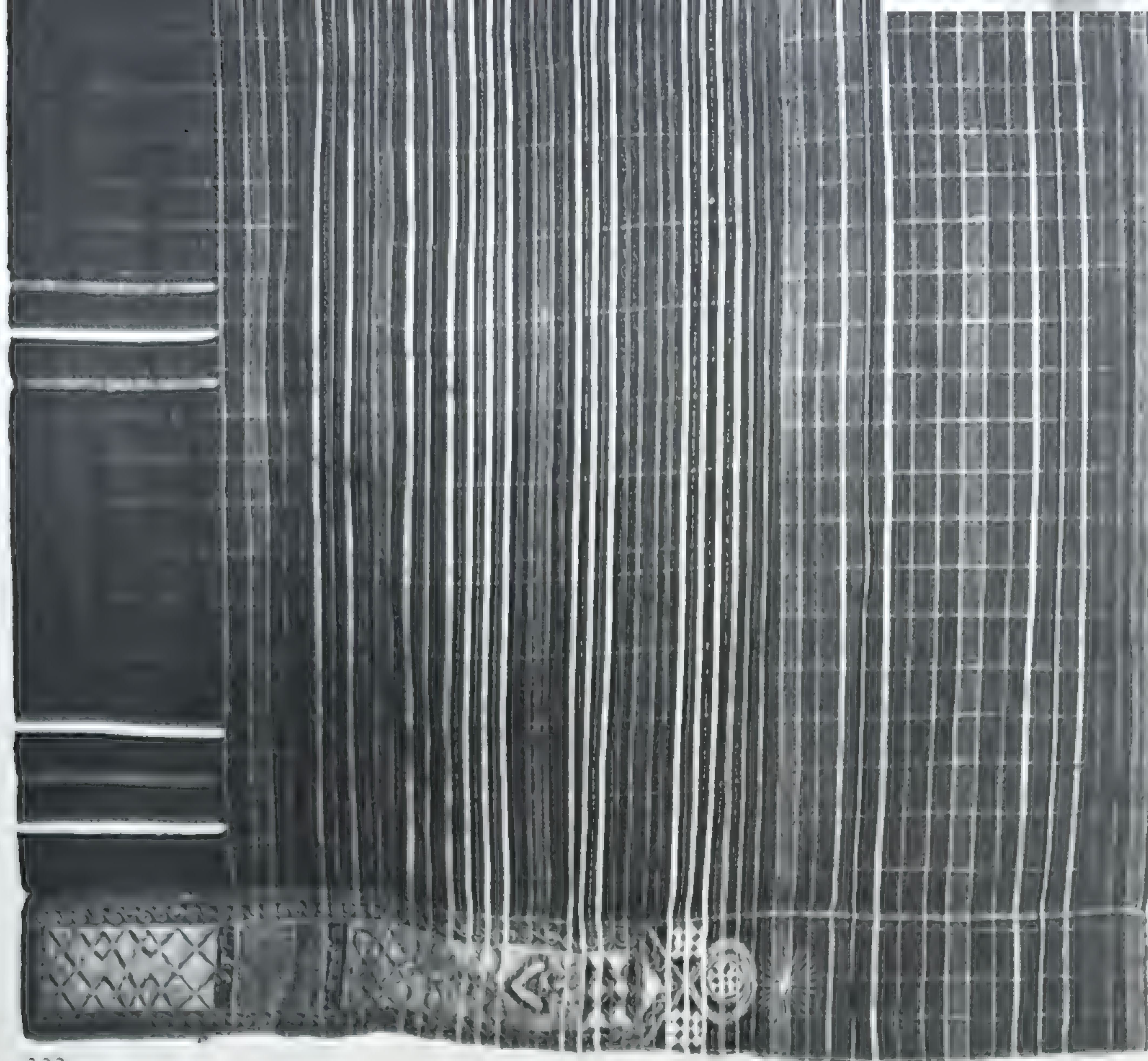
The northern Igbira

There has been a great deal of contact between the Nupe and the northern Igbira over a long period; and one consequence has been the establishment of many parallels in their cloth tastes, not least in respect to *duna*.

The Igbira weavers, like the Nupe, today make great use of factory cotton. Red is a particularly important colour for them, as can be seen in their marriage cloths. Like the Nupe, the Igbira have a system of ranking cloths in importance. Their equivalent of the Nupe *salu* is a cloth called *iktapura*. This, their second marriage cloth (next to *duna*) is dominated by red, with a very wide red selvedge stripe followed by a pattern of narrow stripes of white, pale blue and dark blue. There are also Igbira parallels for other Nupe categories such as *ekwaeko* and *indadogi*, the difference

331 A northern Igbira cloth from Ahoko, near Koton Karifi. Note additional selvedge decoration in the shape of soumak braiding. The hem has been pleated to leave the fringe free.





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332 The second marriage cloth among the northern Igbira, called the *iktapura*. The *soumak* decoration and the machine embroidery are interesting features of the cloth.

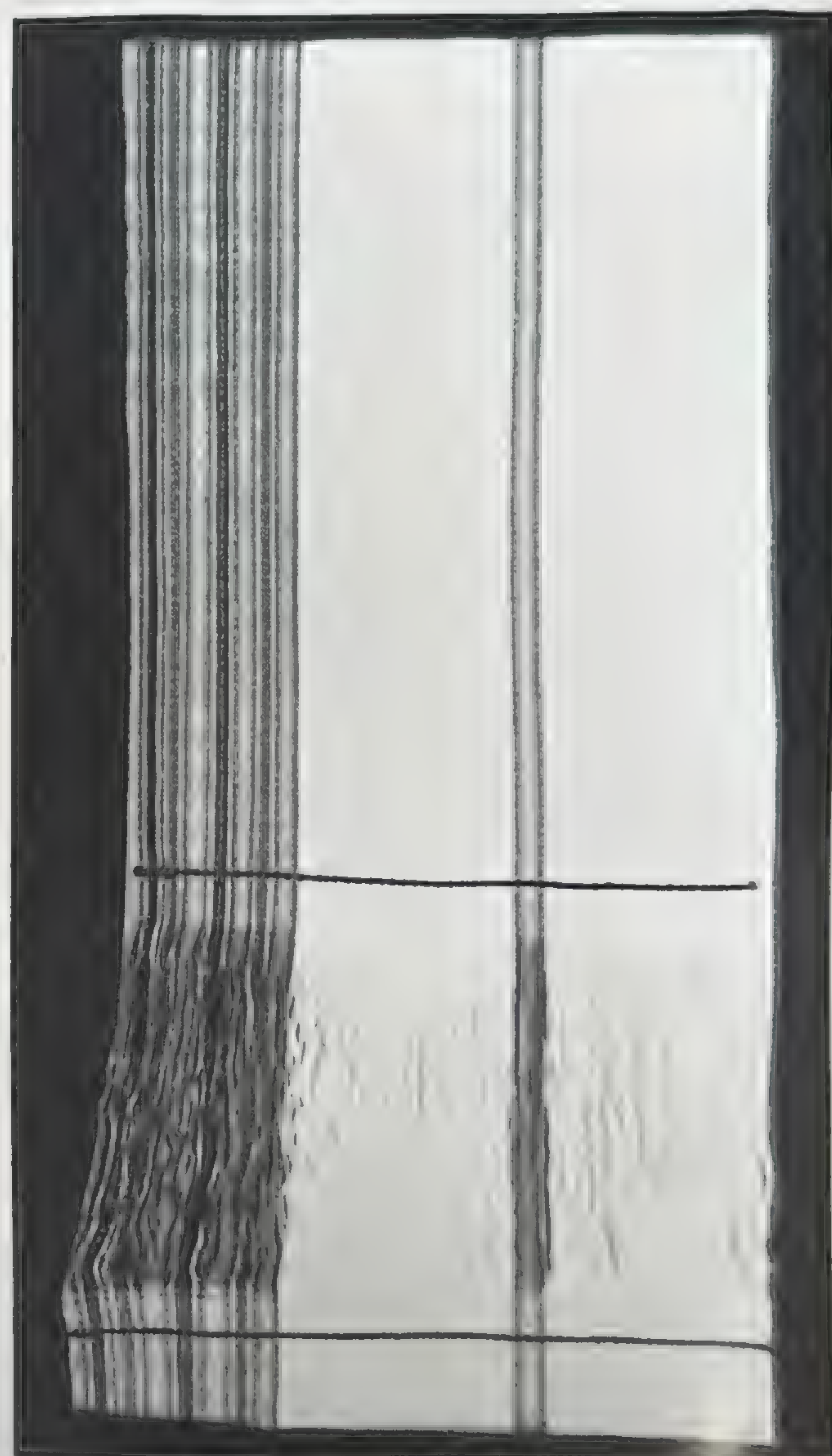
333 A Ganagana cloth woven in Abuja. The left-hand stripes are black and orange on a white ground.

being partly in colour emphasis and partly in arrangement of warp stripes. The Igbira also use *ikat*, mainly in cloths intended to be worn by old people.

The northern Igbira use the same kinds of finish for their cloth, hems and pleats as do the Nupe. They also make use of embroidery to embellish borders. In addition, they employ another technique, known to students of textiles as *soumak*, both to finish off a cloth and to decorate borders along the line of one or both selvages. The method here is to use extra, and thicker, weft threads to make braids across one face of the web. These *soumak* motifs along the selvedge can be simple lines or more complex shapes with points, sometimes recalling the Hausa *aska* motif. *Soumak* can also be used in combination with holes to make a decoration along the selvedge. Holes may be used, indeed, for this purpose without *soumak*.

The Ganagana

The Ganagana are a group very closely related to the Nupe, and they have many cloths in common with the Nupe. Like both the Nupe and the northern Igbira, moreover, the Ganagana attach particular importance to *duna* cloths. They weave, however, a number of cloth designs which are not found elsewhere. A marriage cloth called *eckidukugi*, for example, seems to be peculiar to the Ganagana, as is another cloth with a



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wide selvedge strip consisting of predominantly orange stripes mixed with black, red and white. This last cloth is made in large numbers, and is of particular importance in the Abuja region. Its balance of colours is quite distinct from that favoured either by the Nupe proper or the northern Igbira. It seemed to me that it might have evolved from an old hand spun cotton cloth using traditional dyes such as indigo and camwood. While common among the Ganagana, this cloth did not, as far as I could learn, have any specific name.

and Abaji, is intended for northern markets and, more specifically, for use by the Bororo Fulani. These facts cannot but result in a degree of stylistic confusion.

Weavers in this region are well known for two closely related cloths, *adire* (not to be confused with the various hand dyed Yoruba cloths of the same name), and *maji*. *Maji* is a cloth with a black background and a regular pattern of thin red warp stripes, while *adire* has a red background with black warp stripes. The difference becomes apparent when one examines the warp at the wide selvedge stripe, a



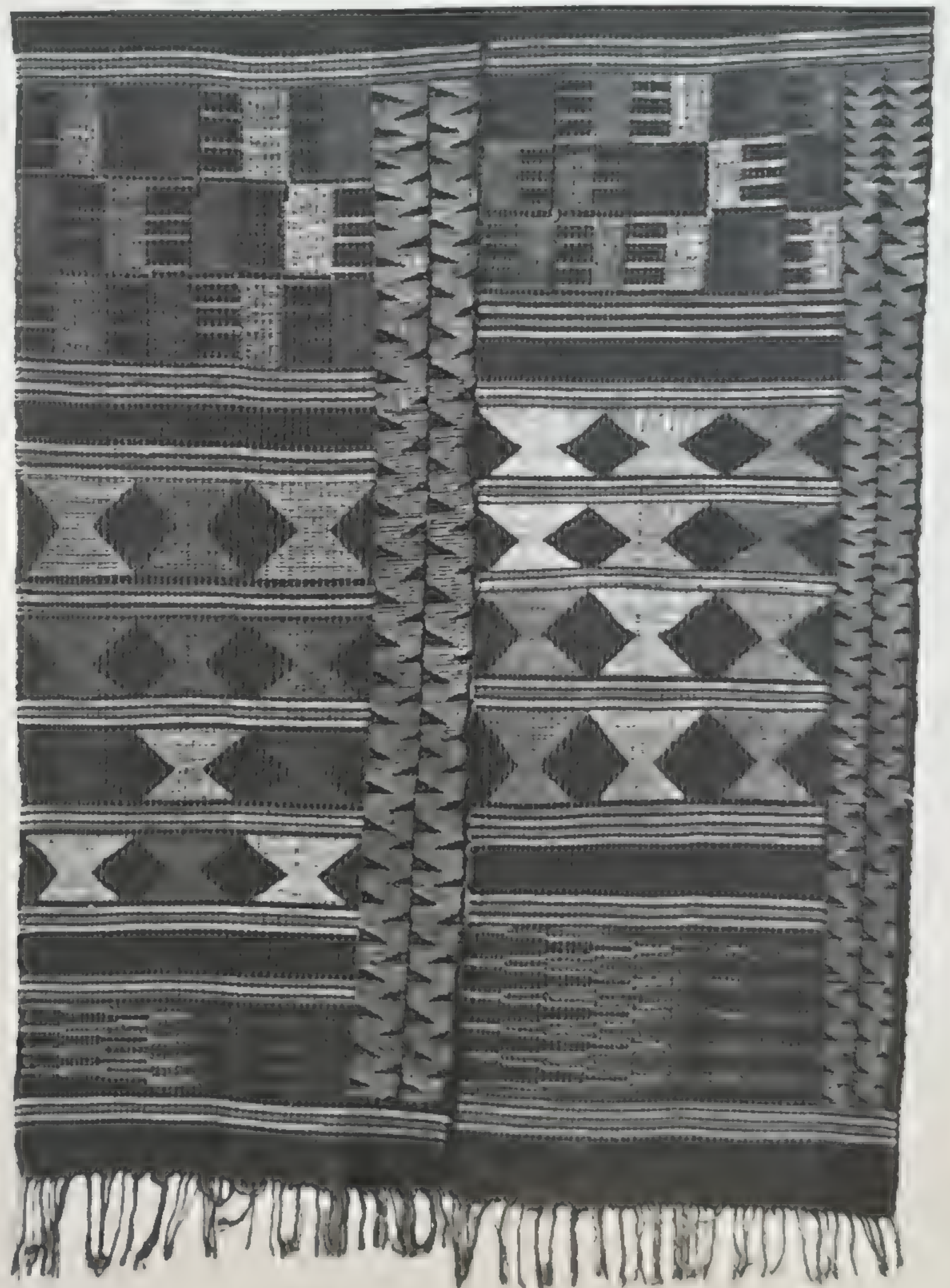
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Keffi and Nasarawa

While the weaving in these two centres is essentially related to that described elsewhere in this chapter, yet Keffi and Nasarawa produce some cloth designs which are very much their own. Some of the weavers here are Gede. Others consider themselves to belong to the Hausa world even though their husbands may look on themselves as being Nupe. Moreover, much of the cloth woven here, as also in nearby towns like Abuja

334 Two Keffi women wearing old and new style marriage cloths. On the right is the traditional *maji* pattern and on the left the newer shiny cloth woven with lurex yarns. The child is also wearing a *maji* cloth.

335 Typical Keffi cloth known as *adire*, distinguished by the even red and black ground stripes and the selvedge *shaludoge* 'snake' pattern.



335



336 Three Keffi weavers dressed in their best handwoven cloths. Note elaborate fringes reminiscent of Okene weaving.

337 An apron used by a Chief in Onda, near Nasarawa. This apron has been fashioned out of a duna-type cloth.

feature of both cloths, which will reveal the main background warp colour. On this background both *adire* and *maji* have elaborate inlay designs in bright colours including such motifs as diamonds, zig-zags, combs and the like. One feature of these cloths is the presence of a yellow weft inlay pattern which runs down the cloth along one selvedge to produce the effect of a single or double zig-zag stripe. This pattern, known as *shaludoge*, occupies that part of the warp where the background colour stands alone and without warp stripes. Both *adire* and *maji* are made today from factory cotton of roughly the same cost, yet for some reason *adire* fetches a higher price than *maji*. The scale of values may perhaps reflect a past when some at least of these cloths were woven from silk yarns and a red background might have involved more of the costly *alharini* than a black background.

Both *adire* and *maji* have been used in Keffi as marriage cloths; but of late they have come to be regarded as rather old-fashioned and have increasingly been replaced by cloths with glittering lurex patterning of a less traditional design. The main market for these two cloths now is among the pastoral Fulani who



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use them for a variety of purposes, for example as wrappers, *zane*, and headcloths, *adiko*. In this market they certainly have to compete with some of the inlay-decorated cloths produced by the male *chakerikeri* weavers which have been discussed elsewhere in this book. There are certain similarities in design between *adire* and *maji* cloths and the family of *duna* cloths; and it is possible that they have a common origin.

Notes

¹ S. F. Nadel, *A Black Byzantium. The Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria*, London 1942, p. 297

² Nadel, *op. cit.*, p. 351.



339 A Keffi weaver working on a *domina* cloth. Certain similarities to the *duna* patterns can be detected, but the inlay motifs here have only been outlined.

338 An interesting cloth woven in Idah, by a Hausa woman, and known as *dina*. This type of cloth may represent a link between the Ijebu-Ode and Akwete patterns in the south, and those of the *domina* and *duna* cloths in the north.



Okene

and its neighbours

Next to Akwete, the town of Okene is probably the best known centre for the woman's vertical loom in Nigeria. Okene, of course, is not only the name of a town but also of a people; and it is situated in that region just to the southwest of the Confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers where the ethnic map is one of considerable complexity. Around Okene there are several people who weave but who are not Okene. Some of these, indeed, may be related to a degree to weaving groups already discussed in earlier chapters such as the Yoruba, the Nupe and the northern Igbira. Within the Okene region in its broadest sense, which for our purposes can be defined roughly as a circle centred on Okene and Kabba with a radius of about fifty miles, the bulk of the cloths woven have certain features in common which justify their being treated within a single chapter.

Of the peoples in the Okene region so defined we can distinguish three main groups. First, there are the Okene themselves, who are members of the Igbira family and who are sometimes referred to as the Igbira Hima.¹ They moved from the north of the Confluence in the early nineteenth century. Culturally, they show traces of influences from neighbours including the Yoruba. Closely related to the Igbira Hima of Okene are the inhabitants of Igara, a town in the extreme north of Bendel State. The Igara people speak an Igbira dialect which the Okene can understand. Igara is surrounded by peoples who belong to the family of Edo speakers and who are related neither to the Okene nor the Igara. Second, there are a number of peoples speaking Yoruba dialects, for example the Yagba, Bunu, Kabba (the Owe), and Ogidi.² Third, there are a number of

groups of Edo speakers such as the people from Unemeh Erhurun near Ukpilla, and weavers around Ososo, as well as some people who may not, strictly speaking, be Edo speakers, for example the Akoko.³ In terms of modern Nigerian States the region covered in this chapter includes the following: the southeastern corner of Kwara State with the towns of Kabba and Okene, and the northern tip of Bendel State with the interesting weaving centre at Igara.

Okene and Igara

Within the complex pattern of settlement described above two weaving centres stand out as being of particular importance and interest, Okene and Igara. While both places are the home of Igbira-speaking people, as weaving centres they have developed along rather different paths; and the contrast between them is instructive. Okene today is the centre for the production of a wide range of bright new cloths reflecting contemporary fashion and destined to find their way to markets far removed from their town of origin. In Okene tradition has to a great measure given way to more recent commercial demands, yet certain traditional burial cloths of great interest are still produced here, using hand spun cotton. In Igara, on the other hand, though many of the weavers are more conservative and have tended to concentrate their productive energies on the weaving of cloths of traditional style in factory cotton intended for local consumption, yet some of the commercial cloths of the Okene type are also produced. The major claim to fame of Igara, however, is in its production of baby ties. These are now distributed so widely throughout Nigeria that there is a high probability that any tufted

baby tie acquired in almost any Nigerian market will have come from Igara.

The Igara four-day market, and the Okene three-day market, as well as its regular Sunday market, are attended by traders, mainly Hausa and Ibo, who are involved in a distribution trade covering much of Nigeria. Buyers from outside Nigeria also come here. We have encountered traders in Okene who originated from as far away as Gambia and Senegal. At Okene much of the primary cloth distribution is in the hands of the actual weavers who wander about the market with cloths draped over their shoulders or carried in neatly folded piles on their heads. Okene market also has a special section where burial cloths are sold, in this case in the main to meet local demand. Igara market is less cosmopolitan than Okene, its cloth wares directed primarily to meet the demand created by local ritual and ceremonial need. It does serve, however, as we have noted, as a major distribution centre for baby ties. Many Igara weavers will try to produce at least two or three baby ties per week to serve as the bread and butter basis for a regular income.

The Okene people are probably the largest single group of users of the woman's vertical loom in modern Nigeria. The earlier history of their craft, and the reasons why it should have so flourished here, are obscure. Today the importance of the craft in Okene is apparent to the casual visitor, since Okene women usually situate their looms in house verandahs overlooking the road, though members of some Moslem families adopt a more secluded place of work. The craft is very much alive in Okene. The great majority of women know how to weave, and the traditional method of transmitting skills from mother to daughter down the generations still functions well enough to ensure that the craft will go on for years to come. Weaving in Igara has close parallels with that in Okene, the main difference being that Igara has not entered, as has Okene, into the business of producing cloths on quite such a large scale for distribution outside the immediate region.

There are two interesting features in looms of this area which distinguish them from looms in many other Nigerian regions, though both features need not be present at the same time and some Okene looms have neither. First: some looms have, as a permanent component of the frame, a lower horizontal member connecting the two uprights. This is fitted to the uprights by means of holes serving as mortices; and its function is both to add stability to the loom and to



341 An Igara loom set up in a house corridor. An extra stabilizing beam can be seen near the floor. The tufted baby tie cloths are typical of Igara weaving.

provide a point of attachment for the lower horizontal beam which is lashed to this cross member rather than directly to the uprights. This feature, however, is not found in the Okene loom. Second: the heddle may have as a heddle stick a thin iron strip rather than the usual length of thin raffia rib. The supplementary heddles, however, which are commonly used on Okene looms, are made in the normal way with raffia sticks.

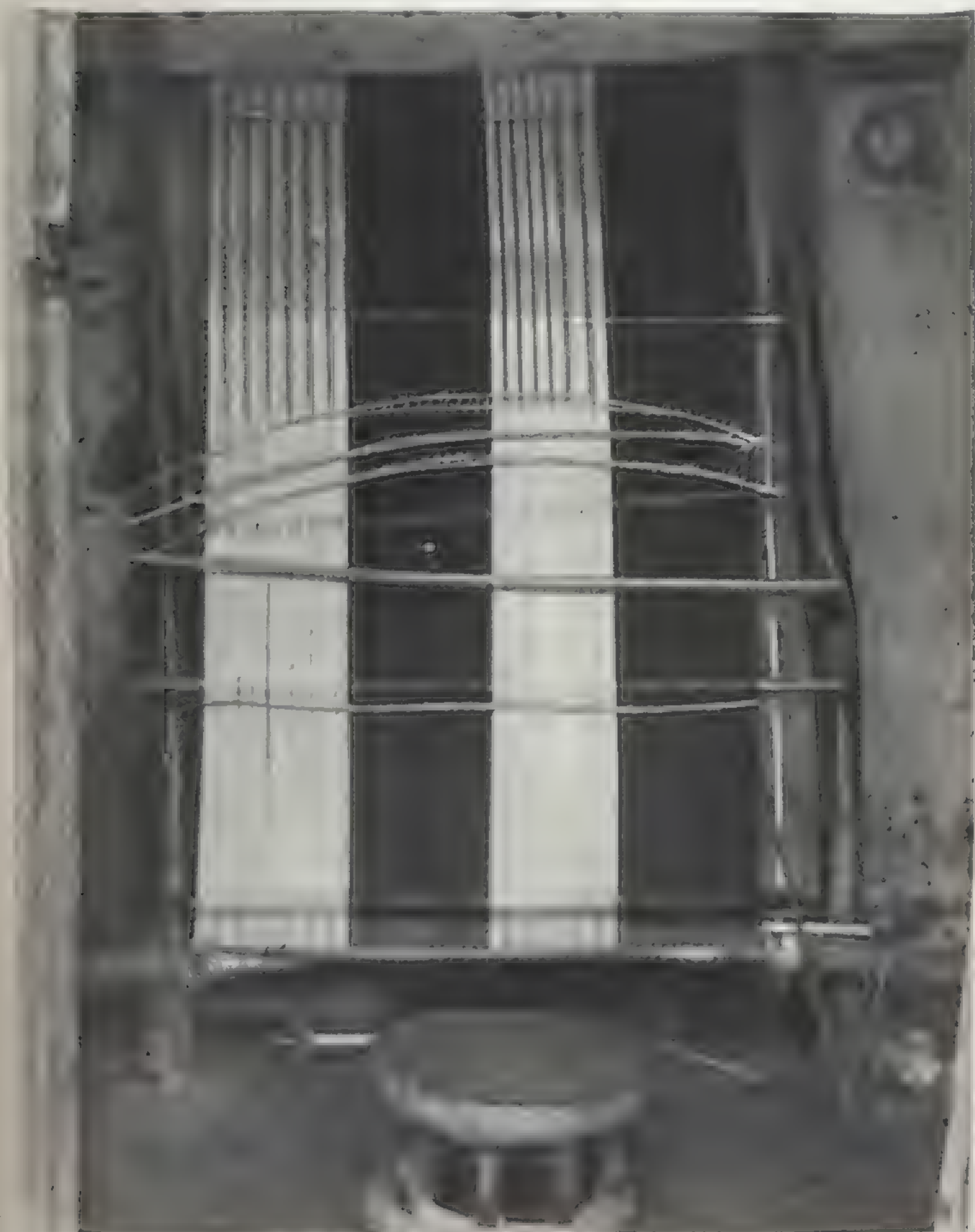
Okene weavers, like their sisters elsewhere in Nigeria, attach special importance to their weaving swords. They also—and this is not a general feature within the Nigerian vertical loom complex—highly value the carved wooden stools upon which they sit while weaving. Like the sword, these stools have acquired heirloom properties.

The following are some of the terms used in Okene for parts of the vertical loom:

- enyita*—the loom as a whole
- oguntoro*—the uprights
- ohoro*—the horizontal beams
- okaha*—sword
- ochiaya*—heddle



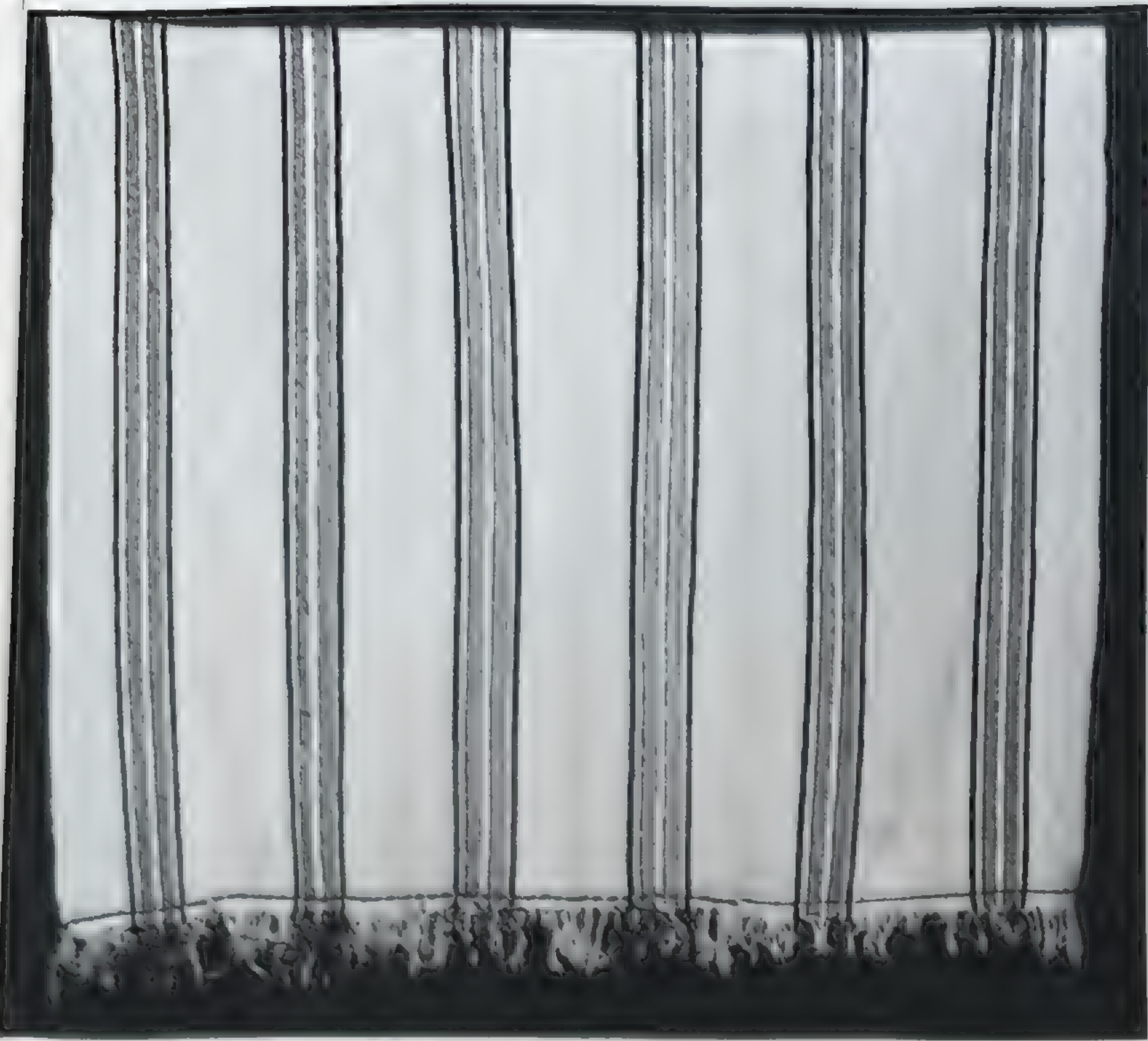
342 A general village scene in Isa-Ami, near Auchi, which has been settled by Igbiras from Okene. 343 Okene loom. A complex inlay pattern known as *onigongo* is on the loom.



outa—tenter
upichi—shuttle
ahasi—shed sticks
ochiaya ebeba—supplementary heddles
irehu—stool

The Okene weavers still use some hand spun cotton, though the bulk of their output today depends on factory-made yarns. At one time it is probable that silk of the *sanyañ* variety was used, notably by weavers in the Ata's palace in Okene; but today this seems to have disappeared. Okene weavers, however, make much use of lurex and other synthetic fibres. An Okene product of great interest is a traditional cloth made from a mixture of cotton and a bast fibre made from a local plant called *kasha*.

A wide variety of cloths is woven in Okene, as one would expect from a craft centre supplying such a wide market. There are, however, some features often encountered in Okene cloths which can be described as being characteristic, notably the use in patterning of a regular array of fairly wide warp stripes, either on their own or with inlay floats, often located between



344 A thick hand spun Okene cloth typical of many village cloths woven in the region. British Museum, London.

stripes. Some Okene patterns can be extremely complex and only possible with the use of numbers of supplementary heddles and supplementary shed sticks. New designs, or modifications of old ones, are constantly being evolved; and the Okene weavers are prepared to look for fresh uses for their wares. For example, they now make denser fabrics suitable for use as blankets, and a thick cloth used as prayer mats of a kind which are popular in northern Nigeria.



Traditional cloths, as we have already noted, are still made in Okene, the most interesting, perhaps, being a cloth often used as a shroud and called *itaogede*. This is of five panels, each incorporating bast fibre from the *kasha* plant along with cotton. The patterning consists of arrangements of indigo blue warp stripes on a natural cotton background. In a five-panel cloth panels one, three and five will have one warp pattern, and panels two and four another. The *kasha* fibre is incorporated into both warp and weft. It is a difficult material to handle. Weavers using it are careful to avoid salt in their food while working because they believe that if they do so their hands will produce an extra salty sweat which can damage the fibre. The effect of *kasha* is to give the fabric a shiny texture which is thought to be reminiscent of *sanyan*. *Itaogede* cloths are expensive and are generally used only in the burials of men of rank or wealth.

The Okene make another burial cloth, *itaokuete*, of three panels each of the same design. *Itaokuete*, now usually made from factory yarn, is decorated with a wide indigo blue selvedge stripe followed by an array of indigo and white stripes; and it is very similar to cloths made by other groups in the general area covered by this chapter, for example the Owe in Kabba and the weavers in Ososo. It is used by women. The hand spun versions, woven outside Okene, are more prestigious than the Okene product and command higher prices which limit their use to the wealthier members of the community. Another Okene cloth, *ala*, sometimes used for burials, is of plain white cotton decorated with changes of texture produced by a delicate technique involving the varied raising of both warp and weft threads. These cloths are particularly appreciated by Moslems, but of late they have become accepted by others as well in place of the traditional *itaokuete*.

The Okene, like many other weaving groups elsewhere in Nigeria, use cloths of special quality for various ceremonies and rituals. Marriage cloths are important; but they do not seem to involve any designs as specific as the *duna* cloths discussed in the previous chapter. Fashion exerts an influence here. In 1978 and 1979 cloths containing lurex were particularly popular. The preparation of marriage cloths, which the bride will take with her to her new home, can be both costly and time-consuming. One bride with whom I talked told me that the preparation of her marriage

345 A heavy shroud cloth from Okene called *itaogede*. The hand spun warp consists of a mixture of cotton and bast fibres called *kasha*.



346 An Okene bride (left) showing off her fine marriage cloths. The bridal dowry took twelve weavers of the family six months to complete.

cloths involved no less than twelve weavers in her family who worked for more than six months to make the required cloths for her marriage.

Okene lies in Kwara State. Just over the border in the extreme north of Bendel State is the town of Igara where the weaving shows many parallels with Okene. At first sight this fact could be puzzling: Igara is located more or less in the centre of a tract of country which the ethnic maps (for example, that published by Bradbury) show to be inhabited by the north-west Edo.⁴ The fact of the matter, of course, is that the process of migration which brought Igbira speakers to Okene also operated elsewhere; and in Igara we see what might be described as an Igbira overspill. In the northern part of Bendel State, which Bradbury labels Kukuruku, there are other small Igbira pockets. Here, however, the settlers have, on the whole, not developed into separate peoples as have the Igara, but have remained part of the Igbira Okene family.

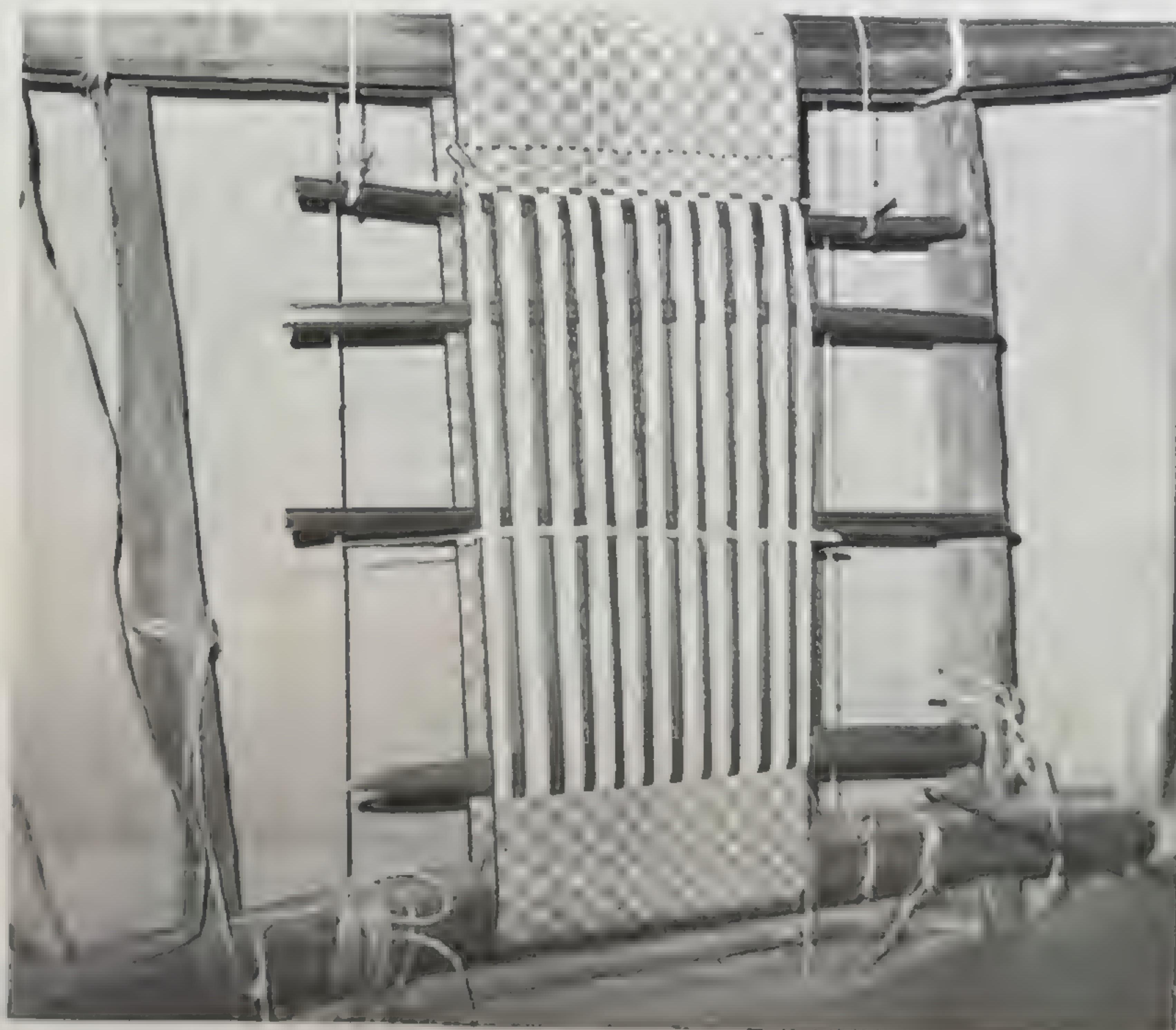
While Igara demonstrates weaving with many parallels with Okene, yet there are differences. As we have already noted, the weavers in Igara, apart from their baby ties, have not developed anything like the commercial significance of Okene. Weaving activity in Igara is not so obvious to the casual visitor as it is in

Okene, for the Igara looms are generally located indoors or within compounds. While the great majority of women in Igara have been taught to weave, by no means all of them now practise the craft. Most of those who do weave appear, on the whole, to be more conservative in their choice of designs and use of modern synthetic yarns. There is continuing interest in traditional cloths, of which some are still woven from hand spun cotton though the greater part are of factory cotton. A particularly important occasion for ceremonial cloth is the *Erepa* festival, an age set ceremony held at seven-year intervals, which calls for cloths of special design quality: much of the cloth worn by men is white, but Igara women have at least one indigo and natural cotton cloth of hand spun yarn, *otowoji*, to wear on occasions such as this. Today, *otowoji* is being copied in factory yarn; and many of the younger girls no longer use the hand spun variety. Many older cloths woven in Igara incorporate *ikat* in their patterning as do some woven by their neighbours among the Yagba, Ogidi and northern Edo. *Ikat*, often yellow on indigo blue, is a feature along with warp striping in many Igara ceremonial cloths.

The eastern Yoruba

Among the eastern Yoruba there are several weaving groups of which the Yagba, the Bunu, the Kabba Owe and the Ogidi are probably the most interesting.

347 A Yagba loom at Insanlu. This basket weave pattern is very popular and is here called *elege-ludo*.



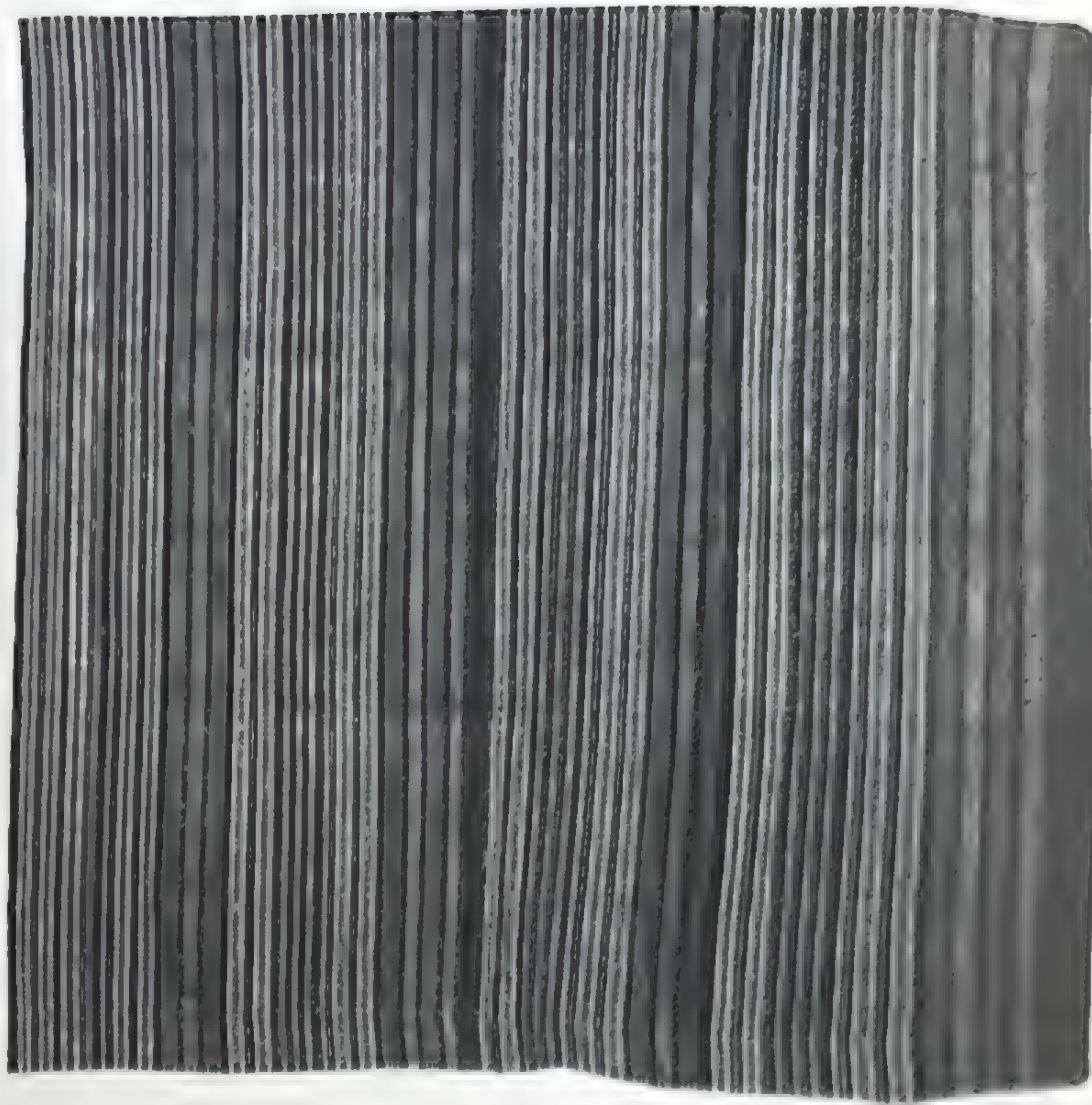
Unlike Okene, these people tend to concentrate on the production of cloth for purely local use. They still use a great deal of hand spun cotton locally dyed with indigo; and they use this material for many domestic purposes such as children's smocks, baby ties, chair seats and the like.

The Yagba number amongst them some exceptionally fine weavers who excel in the execution of the basket weave pattern often known as 'tortoise'. This pattern is basically a compound weave involving a double warp of two different colours, each of which is brought forward alternately in conjunction with an alternation of a weft of two colours also to produce the check effect which is the feature of this kind of design. The pattern is, in fact, quite complicated: it is one of the few examples of compound weave used in Nigeria, where it seems to be confined to the vertical loom. Elsewhere in West Africa, however, it is used by men weavers on the horizontal loom. We have found examples in regions as widely separated as Senegal and Ghana. The evidence is that, in the context of the horizontal loom at least, the pattern is of considerable antiquity.

Yagba, Bunu and Ogidi weavers on the vertical loom are also much taken with the possibilities of *ikat*, which they employ in a manner very similar to that used by other Yoruba weavers both men and women. These weavers, as well as the Kabba Owe, also make fine marriage cloths of the basic Yoruba *kijipa* type from which they differ only in detail: the selvedge stripe is narrower and the warp stripes are more evenly distributed across the remainder of the cloth.⁵ It is common for these marriage cloths to be preserved by their owners for ultimate use as burial cloths.

Many of the younger members among some of these peoples are beginning to depart from tradition and to experiment with lurex and other non-traditional yarns which they can buy in the Okene market nearby. Such cloths are already acquiring significance in the context of marriage; and the time may not be far off when they will start replacing the old traditional designs. The Bunu seem to be particularly conservative in their taste for marriage cloths. They still value highly cloths of hand spun cotton, dark blue with some red and white stripes rather in the manner of Ososo cloths which will be referred to below.

Two traditional cloths woven by the Owe of Kabba are particularly interesting as examples of the relationship between cloth and ceremony in Nigerian societies. Both these cloths are related to the local



348 The first marriage cloth among the eastern Yorubas of the Egbe region, called *teledi*, in hand spun indigo blue and white stripes

349 *Apere Agbakintan*, a special white society cloth worn by the Kabba women, which contains cowries, agates and brass rings twisted into the fringe to enhance its importance.



Ogboni Society, to members of which I am much indebted for information on this subject. Both these cloths, apart from their distinctive designs, are decorated with sewn-on cowries and coins. The first of these is *Maja Olorunyan*, 'Do not argue with God', a red background with inlay floats, which is worn by members of the Society around their waists when dancing. It can have old coins tied into the tassels at its end. The second is *Apere Agbakintan*, named after the predominantly white warp. This cloth is decorated with narrow beige warp stripes which seem to be made from the same bast fibre used in Okene *itaogede* cloths. Cowries are sewn along the borders and the fringes are decorated with such items as agates and small brass rings. Apart from these cloths involved in Ogboni functions, the Owe in Kabba also make a burial cloth very similar to the *itaokuete* traditional to Okene: and they also make, it need hardly be said, cloths intended to be used as everyday wrappers.

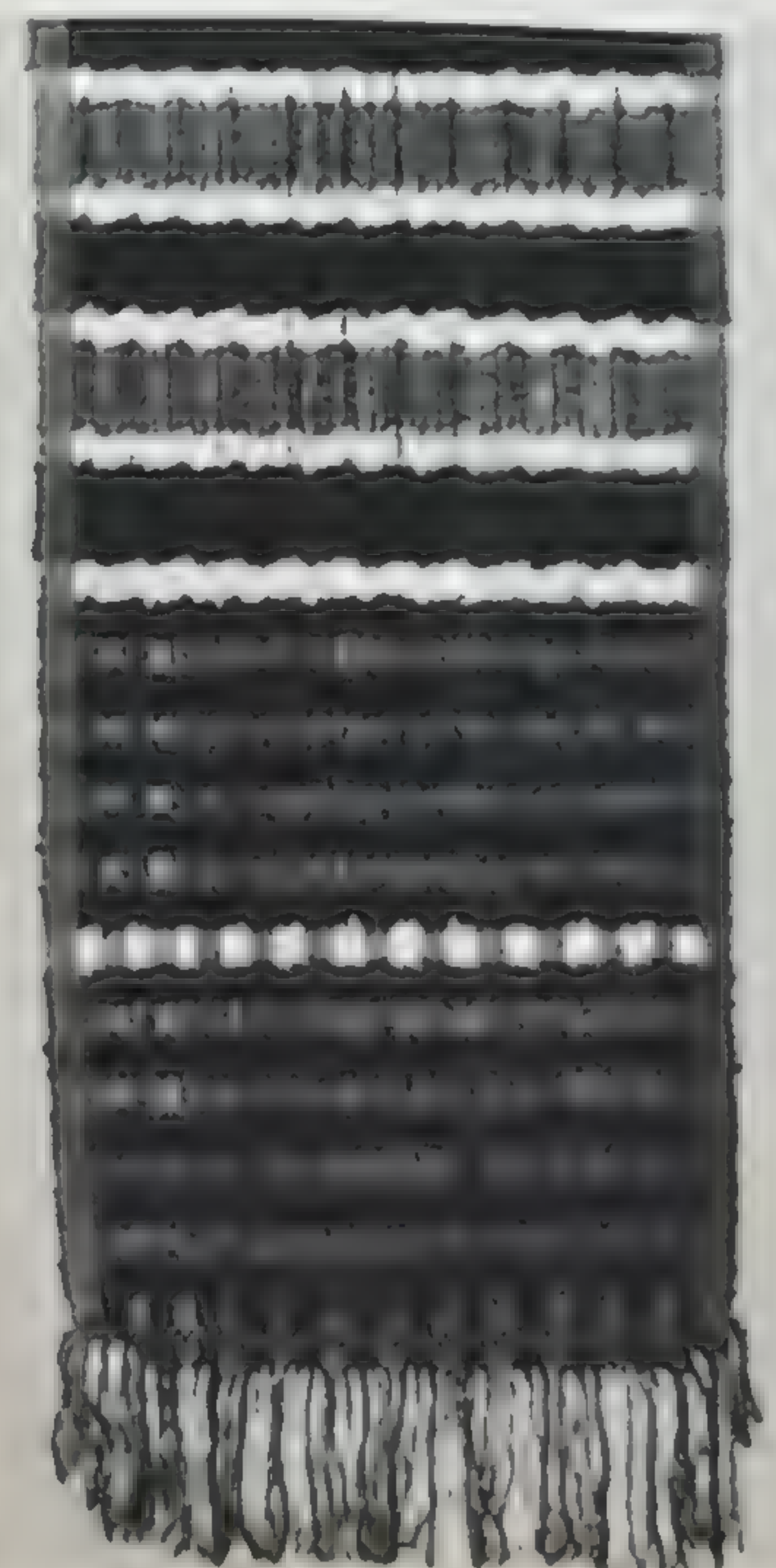
Ogidi weavers also have a cloth of special interest, a burial cloth called *eyerimihe* which is reserved for the use of Senior Elders. This has a wide selvedge stripe of

350 This red Ogboni cloth, called *Maja Olorunyan*, embellished with coins and beads, is worn around the waist during society dancing. See colour picture, page 231.



351 A loom set up on the verandah, a type common to the Owe of Kabba. Note the lower stabilizing beam.

red which provides the dominant colour; and there are narrow stripes of red, white and black, to which a single green stripe must be added. Among the Ogidi, if it turns out that the preparation of a special *eyerimihe* cloth is too expensive, then a plain cloth of hand spun cotton yarn dyed black can serve in its place.



352 An Ogidi cloth with important tufted sections, in bright red and yellow.



353 An elderly woman from Unemeh Erhurun, near Ukpilla, wearing her ceremonial ukpaga cloth.

The northern Edo groups

Among the Edo-speaking peoples in the north of Bendel State there are large numbers of women users of the vertical loom, and it would be the task of a lifetime to attempt to describe them all. Our fieldwork in 1978 and 1979 identified two weaving centres of particular interest among these people, Ososo and Unemeh Erhurun. There are, inevitably, similarities between the products of these two areas and those of the nearby Igbira weavers in Igara as well as their relations across the Kwara State border in Okene. On the other hand, we can find in Ososo and Unemeh Erhurun, particularly in the latter place, quite distinct characteristics which justify their separate treatment.

Although the Ososo people speak an Edo language yet they consider themselves to be a distinct group on their own. They weave some magnificent marriage cloths in the best traditional manner using hand spun cotton. One such cloth, *odulalo*, is particularly attractive. It has a pattern of narrow red warp stripes distributed across a ground of deep indigo blue. During the betrothal ceremonies this cloth will be smeared with a red dye of camwood; and it will be worn by the bride for the month in which the marriage takes place. Cloths of this general kind are still woven in significant quantities; and the craft involved in their production is certainly not on the decline. A number of examples of fine Ososo marriage cloths were collected for the British Museum in 1972;⁶ and six years later we experienced no great difficulty in locating many specimens of the same genre.

The Ososo share much in common with their neighbours such as the Owe of Kabba and the Igbira-speaking Okene. They produce, for example, their own version of the Okene *itaokuete* funeral cloth, called in Ososo *odeasuesa*. It is possible, indeed, that some of the best quality *itaokuete* cloths used in Okene were, in fact, made in Ososo. Here, perhaps, is a good illustration of the way in which, in this area of ethnic complexity, small groups will use each others cloth for ritual and ceremonial purposes. Another example of this kind of phenomenon is the use by the Owe of Kabba, for masquerades associated with funerals, of the red *abata* cloth woven by Bunu men;⁷ and, again, we find among the Bunu the use of Igbira traditions in their own masquerades. We are touching here on a major field for ethnographic research as yet but superficially explored and which lies beyond our present scope. It may well transpire, however, that the common use of various cloth types here in the north of Bendel State and the extreme southeast of Kwara State indicates some measure of common origin; and, further, that the identification of that origin may throw some light on the use of textiles in the ceremonial of the Benin Court.

The other weaving centre which we concluded was of particular interest in this part of Nigeria is that which includes the market town of Ukpilla and its surrounding villages. In the village of Unemeh Erhurun, not far from Ukpilla, we encountered weavers who specialized in the production of a very distinctive cloth of ceremonial import, *ukpaga*. This has a special significance in both marriage and funeral ceremonies among the people around Ukpilla.



353 An elderly woman from Unemeh Erhurun, near Ukpilla, wearing her ceremonial ukpaga cloth.

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354. Madam Comfort Eyekemi wearing a special red ceremonial Maja Olorunyan cloth, seen here tied over an aso oke wrapper. This cloth is worn at Ogboni society meetings. The coral beads are also an important adjunct to the costume.



355 Burial cloth woven for the Elders of Ogidi, called eyerimihe.

356 An odulalo cloth from Ososo, showing a marked red selvedge. British Museum, London.





357 A thick hand spun shroud cloth from Ososo, called odeasuesa. This type of shroud belongs to the same group as the Okene itaokuete.



358 A beautiful hand spun ceremonial kiiropa cloth woven by the Igara, with interesting use of yellow ikat.



359 An Okene weaver living in Jos, wearing her best osarache wrapper and oubobo head tie.

360 A thick hand spun Ososo marriage cloth. During the marriage ceremonies camwood dye is smeared on the cloth; this can just be seen in the centre portion.





Ukpaga cloth is always woven from a white hand spun cotton in a distinctive open weave which involves the twisting of every two warp threads around each other in between every third throw of the weft pick to produce a series of holes which occur as bands between bands of plain tabby weave. After weaving, the cloth is treated by means of a tie-dye technique which recalls that used in the dyeing of *akya* cloth in Wukari.⁸ In the tabby weave sections of the cloth, which at this stage has been taken off the loom but with the warp threads uncut, patterns, series of zig-zags and ovals are sewn in with raffia thread, and the unwoven section of the warp is bound up tightly with plantain leaves. The whole is then dyed in indigo to a dark blue colour. The result is a cloth with an alternation of bands of lacy fabric (with a crochet-like appearance) and bands of white resist pattern. The lacy parts remind one of the effect achieved in the cloths so appreciated by the Gbari and the Tiv.⁹ In other words, in *ukpaga* cloth we have an interesting combination of a number of features which have their parallels with cloths from regions outside the Confluence but more or less adjacent to it. This could suggest the presence of external influences in the Confluence area; more probable, however, is the possibility that the Confluence, with its admirable natural arteries of communication in the Niger and Benue rivers, has over a long period provided an inspiration in textile design to neighbouring peoples. It may well be that the vertical looms discussed in this chapter and the preceding one have had a seminal role in the evolution of the art of the woman's weaving craft in Nigeria.

In Edo life, at least in the Ukpilla region, *ukpaga* cloth still has great traditional importance. A mother will weave such a cloth or otherwise have it prepared for her daughter's marriage. The daughter will wear this cloth to her husband's house. In due course the cloth will be returned to the mother, who will use it for various ceremonial purposes. When so garbed, the mother must also wear a special hat of truncated conical shape made from woven raffia; and, in addition, she should carry in her hands a pair of switches made from horse tails. Eventually, the mother will be buried in one of her *ukpaga* cloths. For women's use the *ukpaga* is made from two panels. There also exists a version in three panels which is used as a man's

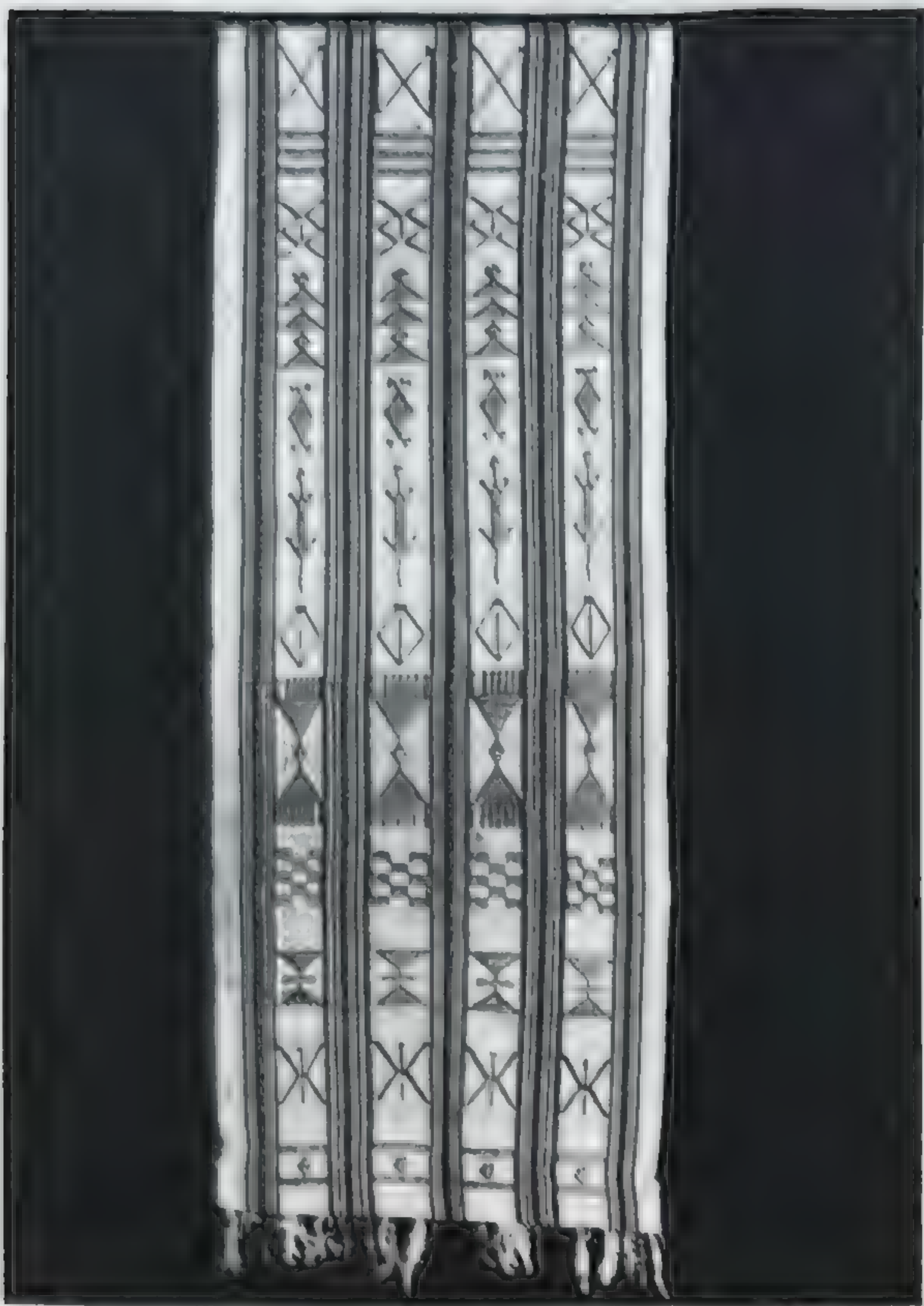
361 *Bunu women in Olle wearing their best marriage cloths. These beautiful wrappers have a certain affinity to those of Ososo.*



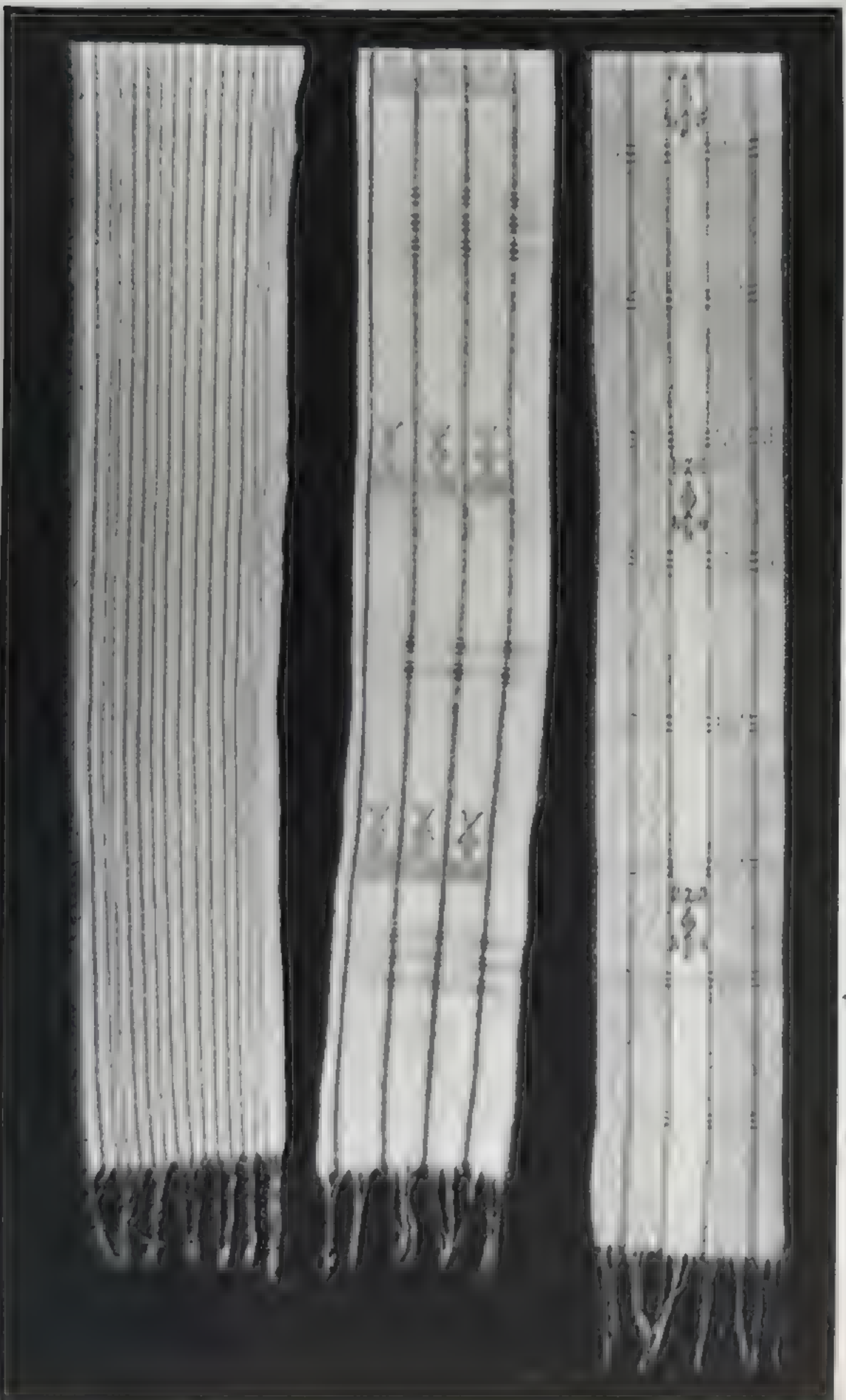
362



362 (top) The preparation of the *ukpaga* tie-dye cloth involves oversewing with raffia before dyeing. 363 (above) shows the finished effect. Unemeh Erhurun, near Ukpilla. Such cloths are used for both marriage and burial.



364 (above) A rare and unusual cloth from Unemeh Erhurun, displaying animals, which can be compared to three cloths below (365), said to be Nupe. All have affinities with domina cloths (See page 221). 365: British Museum, London.



burial cloth. There can be no doubt that in over all effect the *ukpaga* cloth is one of the most dramatic creations of the woman's vertical loom in Nigeria.

Apart from *ukpaga*, the weavers of Unemeh Erhurun produce baby ties as well as another rather unexpected cloth usually used for the covering of chairs. This has a white ground which is broken up into wide stripes by sections of thin red, white and black stripes. Within the wide white stripes inlay floats are sometimes located in a regular array of motifs running across the warp and including, apart from a number of abstract designs such as diamonds, triangles, drum-like forms and the like, some representational figures such as lizards. These representational figures are quite rare in modern Nigerian weaving on the vertical loom; but there are parallels for them in some recent Hausa cloths.¹⁰ Lizards and the like, moreover, feature in certain of the more elaborate *akya* cloths made in Wukari and used, among other things, for ceremonial purposes by the Jukun.¹¹ Here, again, is a possible example of the influence of the Confluence region in the history of Nigerian textiles.

Notes

¹ P. Brown, 'The Igbara', in D. Forde, ed., *Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence*, London 1970, p. 58.

² D. Forde, *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of South-western Nigeria*, London 1969, p. 74.

³ R. E. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-speaking Peoples of South-western Nigeria*, London 1970, pp. 100, 110.

⁴ Bradbury, op. cit., facing p. 164.

⁵ See Chapter 7.

⁶ Collected by J. Picton, whose forthcoming essay on this subject was, unfortunately, not available when this book went to press.

⁷ For *Bunu abata* cloths, see Chapter 2.

⁸ For *akya* cloths in Wukari, see Chapter 5.

⁹ See Chapter 5.

¹⁰ See, for example, the cloths illustrated in B. Menzel, *Textilien aus Westafrika*, Berlin 1972, Vol. I, figs. 113, 118 and 119.

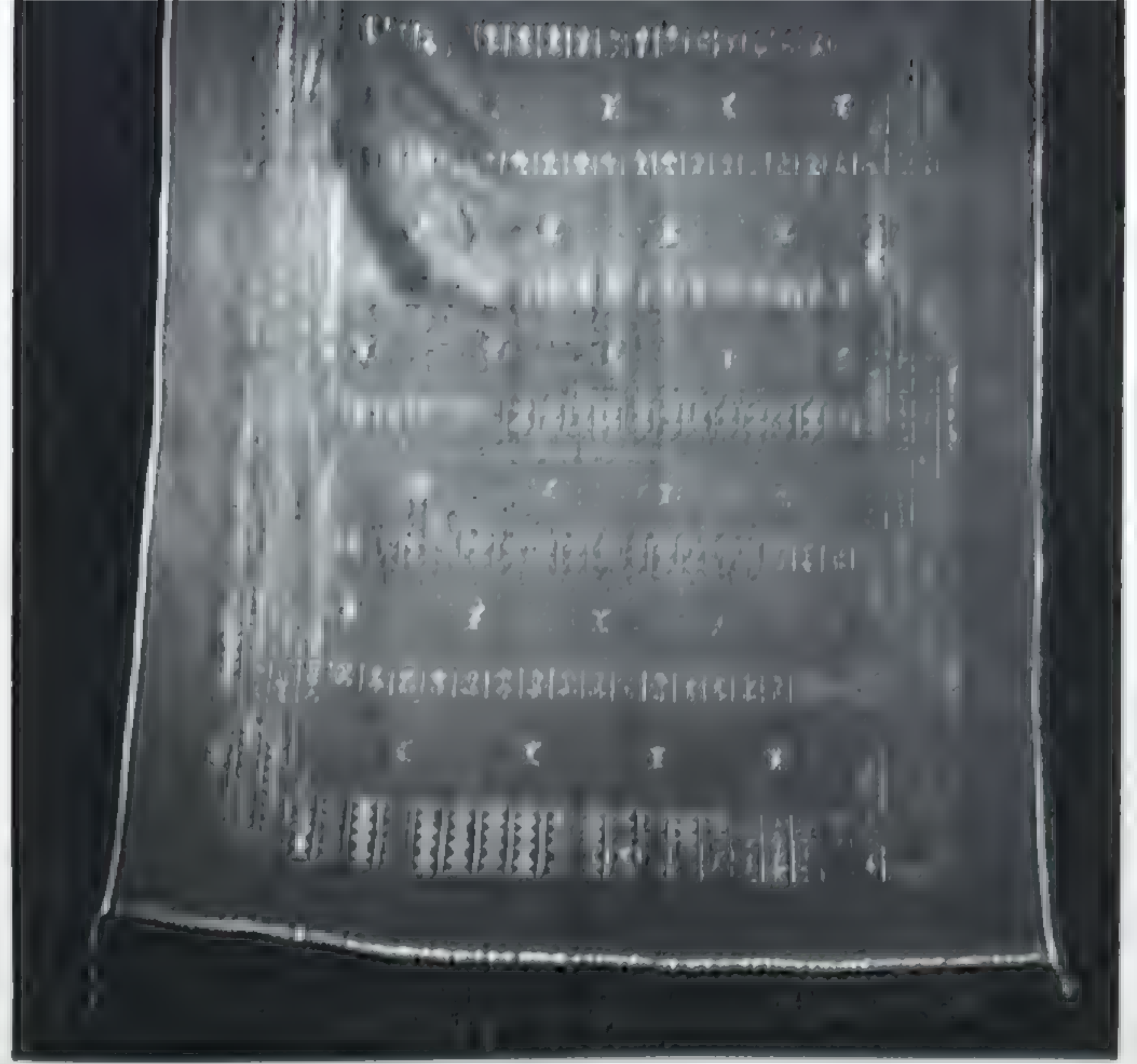
¹¹ For an illustration of an *akya* cloth of Jukun ceremonial importance and with representational animal motifs, see Chapter 5.

10 The Ibo-speaking weavers

Akwete is probably the most famous of all places associated with the use of the woman's vertical loom in Nigeria. It was an Akwete loom, for example, that graced the cover of Ling Roth's *Studies in Primitive Looms*, one of the pioneering works in the serious study of extra-European weaving. Akwete, however, as it should by now be clear enough, is not the only centre for the vertical loom in Nigeria; nor, indeed, is it the only such centre in that part of Nigeria occupied by Ibo-speaking peoples. There are, in fact, three major groups of weavers here. The first, which includes Akwete, is located in the Ndoki region of Imo State, about forty kilometres to the east of Port Harcourt in Rivers State. The second weaving area is in the district of Asaba in Bendel State along the west bank of the Niger at a point roughly half way between the Confluence and the Delta. Third, there are a good number of weavers in and around Abakaliki in the eastern part of Anambra State. In addition, there are a number of other areas where there are pockets of Ibo-speaking weavers of sufficient size to deserve some mention here: I have made a particular study of two of these, around Owerri in Imo State and Nsukka in the extreme north of Anambra State. To these we have added in this chapter a further group of weavers, Tiv rather than Ibo-speaking, who work in villages in the country between Gboko and Katsina Ala in Benue State. They are not in any way related to the cultural world of the Ibo, however, and their inclusion here is based on considerations of geography.

Akwete origins

The origins of the Akwete weaving tradition are far from clear. It seems likely that a number of external



366 A modern Akwete cloth called *Oil Boom*.

influences combined in Akwete to bring into existence those cloths which are now considered to be characteristic of this region. It may be that the Akwete weavers were influenced by the designs of oriental cloths, particularly those from India, which from the first days of Portuguese contact with Benin at the very end of the fifteenth century were being traded into Nigeria. Again, it is possible that other indigenous African cloths, for example those produced by male Ewe weavers on the horizontal loom in what is today Togo and Ghana, or the Ijebu-Ode cloths woven by the Yoruba, both of which have been articles of trade for centuries, exerted their influence.¹ It is a fact that Akwete cloths of the *george* variety remind one very strongly of Indian textiles, and that Ewe parallels can be found easily enough for the *popo* cloth of Akwete. Another possibility, suggested by Talbot, is that the Akwete weavers derived their craft from the north through the Nwgo people who lived to the north of the Etche.² Whatever the sources of inspiration, once they had reached Akwete they underwent considerable evolution.

In Akwete there exist some widely known traditions concerning the origin of the weaving craft. The distinctive designs which give many Akwete cloths their particular character, are attributed to a certain Madam Dada Nwakata. She created these designs in secret so as to prevent others copying her ideas; and when she left her loom she placed spells on it to deter the inquisitive. It was she, the story goes, who first started working in silk as well as cotton. It is not clear when Madam Dada Nwakata flourished: some say early in the age of first contacts with the Portuguese; but other evidence suggests the nineteenth century. Another figure in the Akwete tradition is Madam



367 The tomb and monument of Madam Jorji Nmereji Nbokwo, a famous Ibo weaver of Akwete.

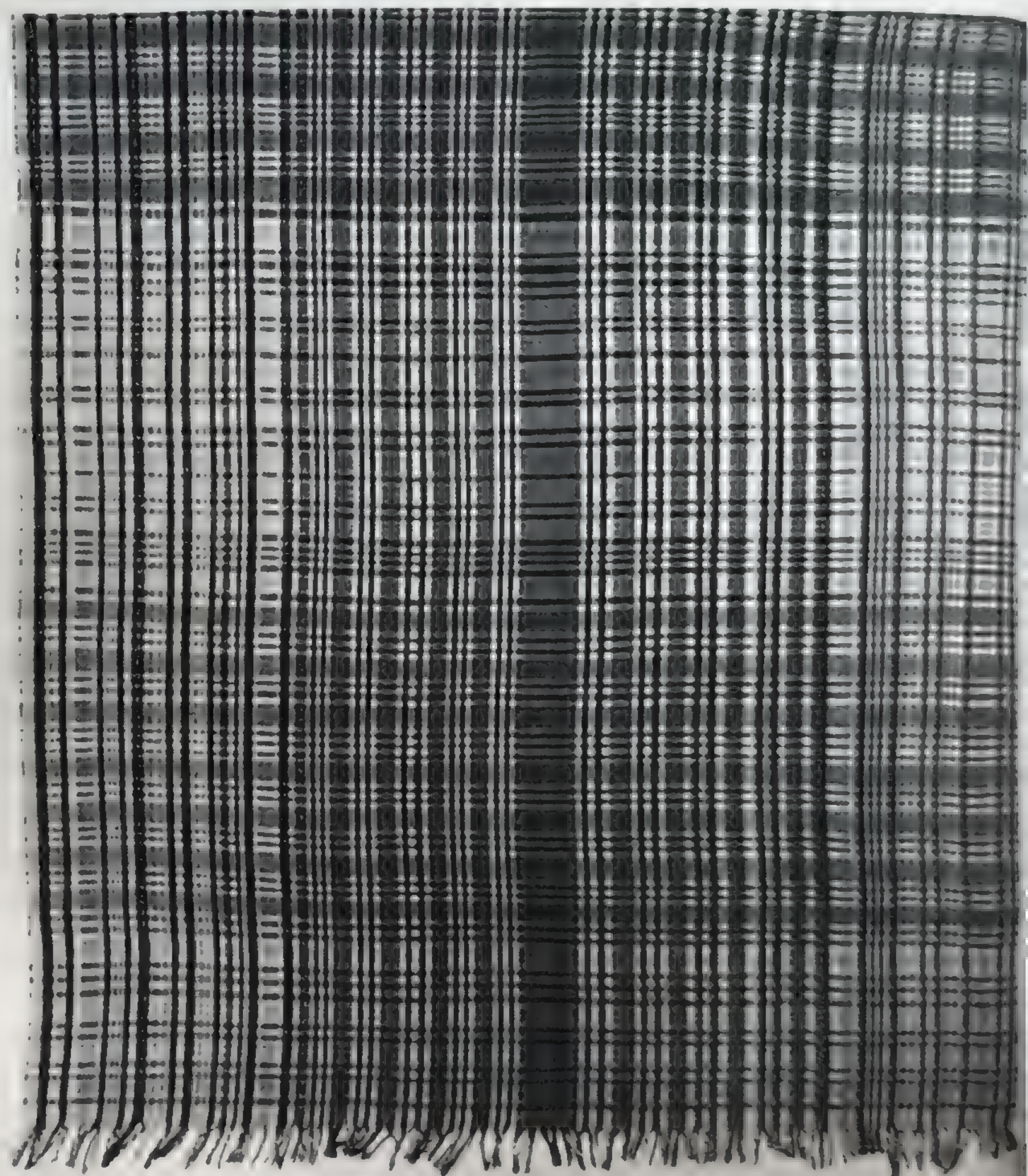
Nwarikpei Ekpo, who, because she saw new designs in her dreams, is generally referred to as 'the Dreamer'.

We are on firmer historical ground with Madam Jorji Nmereji Nbokwo, also known as Madam Mgbokwe Jorji. She was a famous weaver who died in 1921 and whose monument can still be seen in Akwete. By the time of her death the family had changed their name from Jorji to George; and it seems more than probable that the Akwete cloth called *george* is named after her. This design is fairly certainly derived from that of imported Indian cloths of the Madras or Pulicat variety; and a photograph published in Mary Kingsley's narrative in the 1890s makes it clear that this *george* cloth was being woven at that time, when Madam Jorji Nmereji Nbokwo would have been about forty years of age.³ In more recent times the term *george* has expanded to cover a wide range of cloths of light weight, local and imported. Thus today there is the genuine original *george*, known as Akwete *george*, which is woven on vertical looms in Akwete, as opposed to imported *george* or silk *george* which come from some factory either in or without Nigeria.

The origins of *popo* cloth, as has already been suggested, are not difficult to find. It is a type of cloth woven for sale in Opobo market, and also in Bonny, in deliberate competition with the Ewe cloths from Keta in Ghana (Gold Coast) which are still sold. *Popo* cloth used to be held in high esteem; and among women in the old town of Bonny, in Rivers State, it is still used for ceremonial purposes.

The influence of the Yoruba Ijebu-Ode cloths on Akwete weaving is impossible to document. It is hard to resist the conclusion, on purely stylistic grounds, that the Ijebu-Ode *oni* ('crocodile') motif provides the prototype for the ceremonial Akwete *ikaki* ('tortoise') cloths much valued by the King and chief counsellors of Bonny for, among other things, use in the *Fubara Alali* ceremony which takes place every seven years. Today, all the royal cloths in Bonny are woven in Akwete; and it is of interest that these bold, almost startling, patterns in the Bonny cloths appear repeatedly, albeit in a more restrained form, in many more humble Akwete cloths. Perhaps we have here one clue to the rise of the Akwete weaving industry. This is a part of Nigeria where the men's vertical loom has not penetrated. It could well be that Courts in this part of the Niger Delta, Bonny providing one example, created (perhaps as a result of prosperity derived from trade with the outside world) a demand for ceremonial cloths which Akwete came to meet, drawing in the

368 An example of typical Ibo george cloth.



369 An Akwete popo cloth, named after the coastal town of Opobo, where such cloths were originally sold.

of the Niger Delta. If these various speculations have any merit, then we could argue a date for the beginning of Akwete weaving at least in the first phase of Portuguese contact, if not earlier; and we could argue with some conviction that, along with the expansion of the trade of the Niger Delta, the Akwete industry must have been flourishing in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries.

The Akwete loom and its users

The Akwete loom differs in a number of significant respects from other varieties of the woman's vertical loom in Nigeria. It is considerably wider, capable of taking a warp width of over four feet. It is made with very great care, being the result of work by specialist carpenters. Its lower horizontal beam, in contrast to looms elsewhere, is permanently fixed by means of mortice joints to the two vertical uprights: only the upper horizontal beam is capable of movement by means of adjustment of its sling attachments. The uprights are joined, above the upper horizontal beam, by an extra cross member also fixed to the uprights by means of mortice joints. In other words,

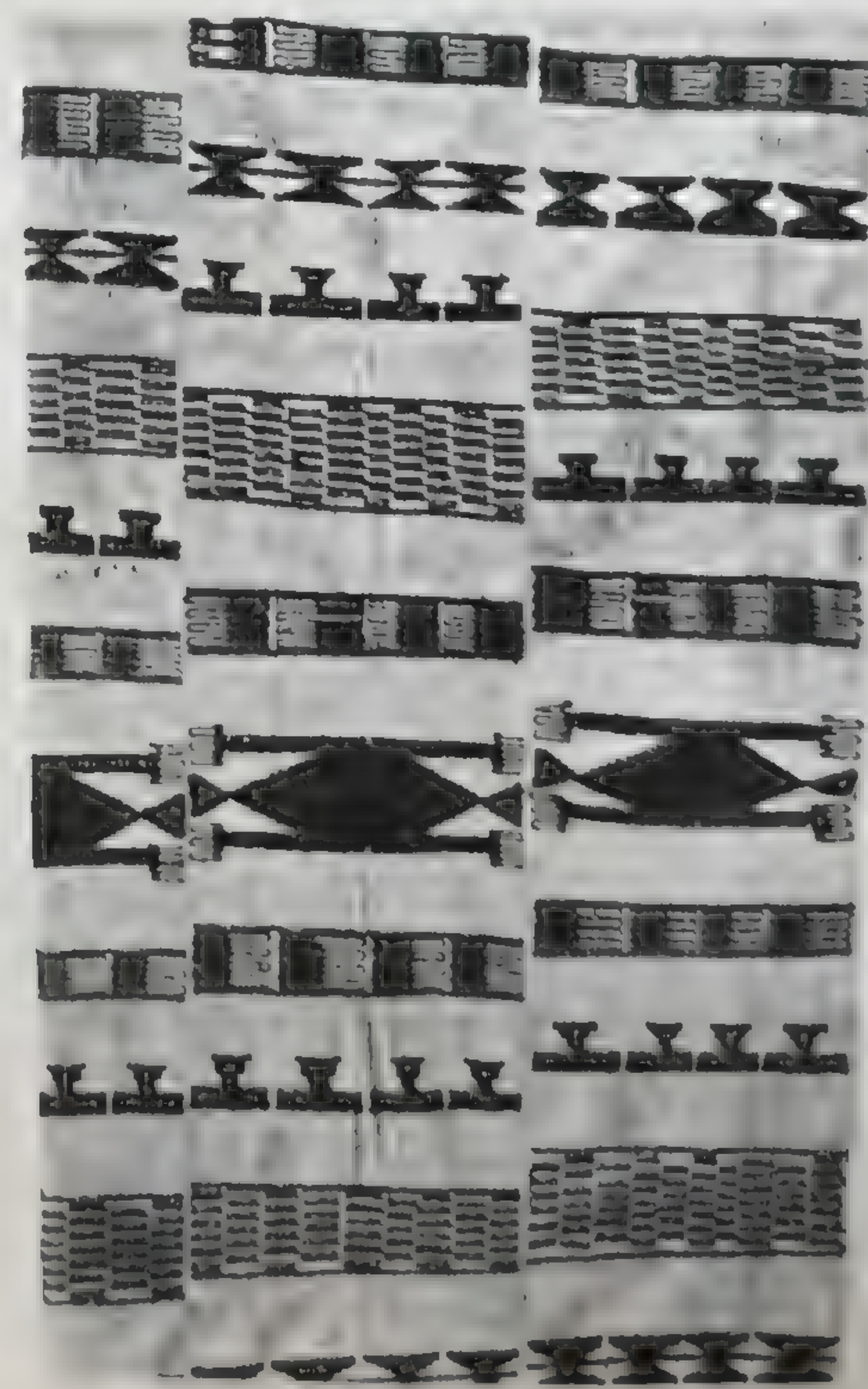
process on the traditions of other Nigerian regions and on the example of imported cloths both from Asia and elsewhere in Africa. In this context it is an interesting fact that of all the centres of weaving by Yoruba women on the vertical loom, Ijebu-Ode is that which is nearest, by means of coastal navigation, to the region



370 An Akwete cloth *meni egere bite*, woven for the women of the Court of Bonny, possibly with Ewe influence.



371 The *ikaki* (tortoise) motif, seen here on a Bonny cloth.



372 Another *ikaki* cloth from Bonny in three panels, each 14 inches wide.



373 *Madam Clementine Onyekwere, an Ibo of Akwete, working on a popo cloth. The Akwete loom is the widest in Nigeria.*

the whole loom, consisting of uprights, lower horizontal beam and upper cross member, has the form of a rectangular frame. This frame, again in contrast to other looms, leans away from the wall such that while

the bases of the uprights are about six inches away from the wall their tops are at least eighteen inches away. The frame of the loom can be constructed from raffia palm; but in wealthier households it may incorporate members made from *iroko* wood, a material also used for the sword and the spreader.

The spreader is another distinctive Akwete feature. This is a stick, made of hardwood rather than the usual raffia rib, of roughly diamond-shaped cross section. Along the two edges in the horizontal plane are carved a series of tooth-like notches so arranged that, starting in the middle, they point away towards the ends rather like the barbs of a harpoon but in reverse. It is located above the main shed sticks through the warp; and its purpose is to keep the warp threads spread out, a function sometimes served in other looms by the use of a tenter, a stick with points at either end which keep the selvages apart. The Akwete spreader is of particular interest in that it is also used in the man's upright raffia loom found among the Anang.

We located and studied a good example of such a raffia loom at Ikot Ekpene in Cross River State. This loom will be discussed in Chapter 12.⁴ Since raffia looms of this kind are, in fact, among the most north-westerly examples of a raffia weaving complex which extends down the western African coast to Angola (and with a few isolated representatives to the west of Nigeria in, for example, Sierra Leone), one cannot ignore the possibility of the existence of some relationship between the raffia loom and the woman's vertical loom in Nigeria.⁵ This will be considered in Chapter 12.

The Akwete loom, like that in Okene, makes considerable use of supplementary heddles which are located below the spreader, and which may be used in conjunction with extra shed sticks.

There is a tradition that an Akwete loom ought not to be taken away from Akwete or used by anyone other than an Akwete weaver. Akwete weavers, on the whole, will not object to other Akwete weavers using their looms.

As elsewhere in Nigeria, in Akwete the weaver attaches special importance to her weaving sword, which she may well have acquired from her mother and which in turn she hopes to hand down to her own daughter. A daughter may carry her weaving sword at her mother's funeral.

The following are some names for loom and loom parts used in Akwete:

- nkwe*—loom as a whole
- ebubu nkwe*—horizontal beams
- ahia*—heddle
- otiti*—sword
- ekike*—spreader (an unique Akwete component)
- agba*—shuttle



374 Detail of inlay weaving on the Akwete loom. A small brass tool, the *nkpo*, is used to serve as a bobbin and inlay sword.

paapaa—supplementary heddles

owuwu—warp

okuku—weft

nkuru di na nkwe—web

nkpo—brass tool, about six inches in length, used for beating inlay threads in *popo* cloth

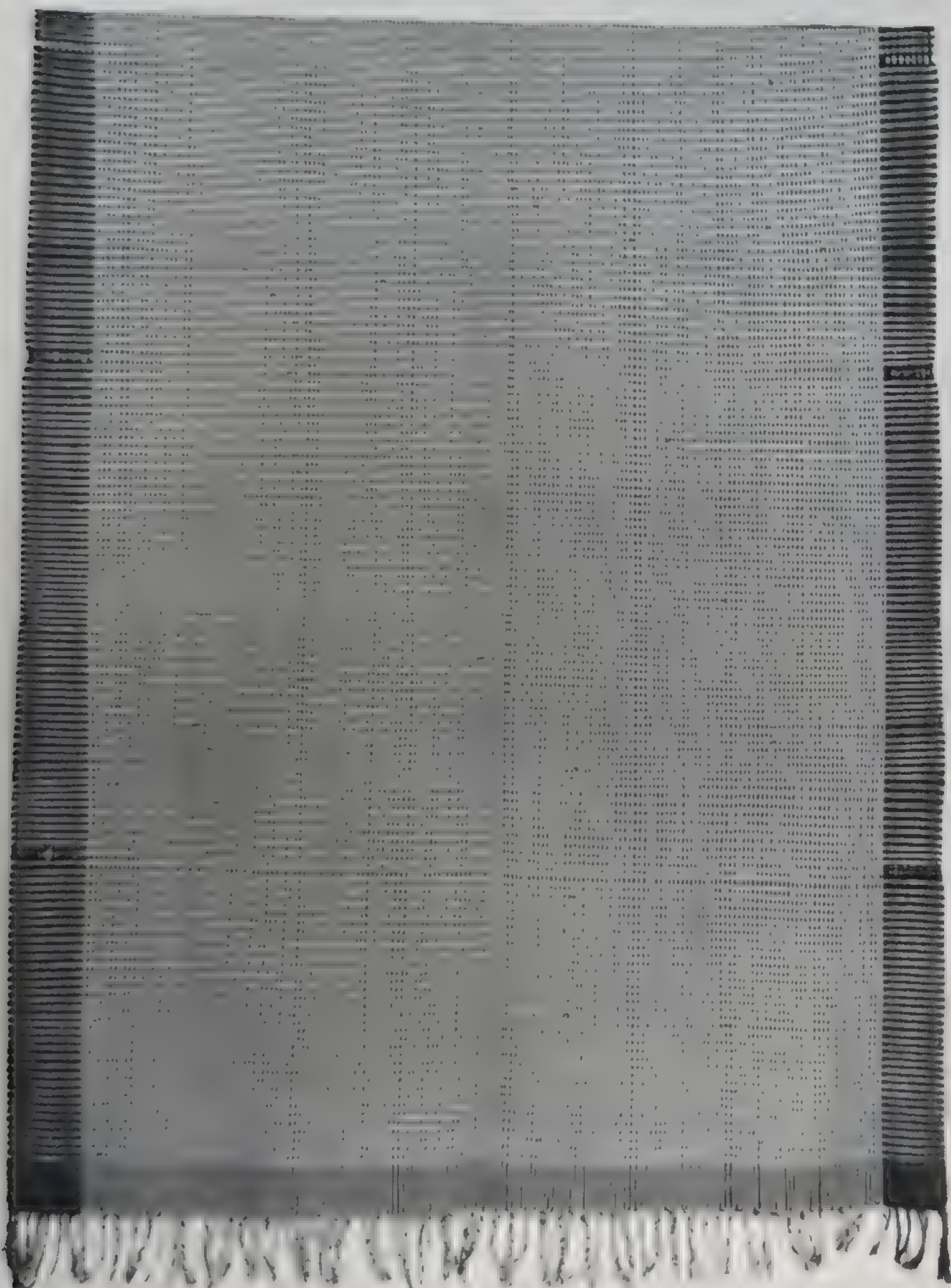
Akwete weavers are concentrated in Akwete town and its immediate surroundings. My own fieldwork suggested that virtually all women in Akwete know how to weave, whether they practise the craft or not. Instruction starts early, and girls work at the loom even during the period of their schooling. Today many younger Akwete women have found work away from their home town; but weaving is so much in their blood that it is by no means uncommon for such migrants from Akwete to return home for a bit of weaving during weekends and holidays. Weaving instruction begins with a very narrow web mounted on a full size loom, or on a simulated loom using the legs of a wooden stool. By the age of twelve most Akwete girls will have started weaving in earnest, usually as apprentices to an experienced weaver, preferably a member of the family. An experienced weaver will produce a cloth in six to ten days, depending on the complexity of the pattern involved.

I was very fortunate to have been able to talk to Madam Abigail Ekeke, who guessed in 1979 that she

was about eighty years old, about her craft. Although now old and with failing eyesight, Madam Ekeke still weaves, and can cope with most patterns though she admits that some of the most recent designs created by fashion are a little bit too complicated for her. She uses some twenty basic motifs which she builds into the design of her cloths. She weaves both for special order and for the market. Madam Ekeke came to Akwete as a young girl after her marriage, which must have been about the time of the outbreak of the First World War. At that time she was taught to weave not only with hand spun cotton but also with yarn that contained local raffia. She thought that at that time most of the cotton came from the Owerri and Onitsha districts; and she recalled that there was then no dyeing in Akwete, this work being carried out to the north, perhaps in Aba (where dyeing still goes on).

The skill of the Akwete weaver lies to a great extent in the way in which she can manipulate a repertoire of stylized motifs into a wide range of different arrangements. Akwete weavers, however, are very inventive and new motifs are frequently appearing. Those which catch on will create a demand for a large number of cloths of the same design. Not so long ago it was

375 This older type Akwete cloth, called *agbani*, is now worn only by the elderly. Note the selvedge holes, called *nkpose*.



common for certain families to acquire a reputation for their skill in the execution of specific patterns, so much so, indeed, that the family, or even the individual weaver, could be identified by the presence of a particular motif on a cloth. Today, however, fashions change so quickly, and new designs come and go so fast, that such identification is no longer easy, if indeed possible. It is this rapid change in taste which has troubled old weavers like Madam Ekeke.

Akwete cloth

Writing in the early 1930s, the ethnographer Amaury Talbot observed that Akwete cloth, 'formerly termed Akwa-Miri (cloth of the water), because it was said to have originally been made for use as a towel when bathing . . . has gained in elaborateness of pattern year by year and now is worn for occasions of ceremony'; and he added that, 'unfortunately, European cotton is now often used, as is also the case with many dyes, which run in the wash, whereas pieces woven thirty years ago from native cotton are as fresh today as when they came from the loom.'⁶ These are interesting remarks. First, they indicate the manner in which Akwete designs were already in a state of evolutionary flux some fifty years ago; and second, they suggest that the replacement of hand spun cotton by the factory product was already well under way at about the time, c. 1920 let us say, when Madame Ekeke started weaving in Akwete. For this last there is other evidence available. There are a good number of Akwete cloths in the Museum of Mankind (British Museum) in London which were collected before 1934. All the examples there which I have examined are of factory spun yarn and it is quite true that in many of them the dye has run. Today (1980), for all practical purposes Akwete relies for its production on factory made yarn.

Akwete cloths are usually intended to be used as single panel cloths. They are woven with a wider warp, which can be over four feet, than any other cloth woven on a vertical loom in Nigeria. A distinctive feature of Akwete cloths is that one end is quite significantly wider than the other, sometimes by as much as five inches or so; the reason lies in the Akwete weaving technique leading to an expanding warp, perhaps a consequence of the combination of a very wide web with the use of the warp spreader rather

376 A young Akwete woman wearing a george cloth.





377 A rare Ibo cloth from Akwete, containing zoomorphic motifs. Beving collection, 1934. British Museum, London.

378 An Ibo Akwete cloth, showing motifs such as the mbubo (comb), nkpuru (ludo), and ebe. A simple type of ikaki can also be seen. The distribution has a duna-like quality. Beving collection, 1934. British Museum, London.



379 An Ibo Akwete cloth, showing unusually wide warp blocks of colour. Beving collection, 1934. British Museum, London.



than tetter. Other Nigerian cloths woven by women show signs of a small spread at one end, but never anything on the Akwete scale.

Akwete cloth can be divided into three main categories: *george* cloth with its design of stripes and checks; *popo* cloth with inlay designs patterned on the cloth of the Ewe male weavers from Ghana and Togo; and *akwete*.

Akwete includes a number of cloths with a most unusual feature in the context of the woman's vertical loom in Nigeria, namely the use of inlay which is either wholly or partially reversible. Two cloths are of particular interest in this context, *Dada Nwakata* and *Nnade*. *Dada Nwakata* is named, it is said, after a famous weaver who was the first to produce a reversible cloth; and *Nnade*, I was told, commemorates a warrior who was presented with a cloth of this design on his return from a successful campaign. *Nnade* has a pattern based on a system of checks built up from stripes and bands, with inlay motifs inserted in a regular array into the checks. Traditionally, this cloth was worn only by warriors and chiefs for certain ceremonial purposes; but today,



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380 Aziza, a modern Akwete design meaning broom.

381

381 A modern cloth called uto naikaki—'mat with a tortoise'. A common Ibo pattern.

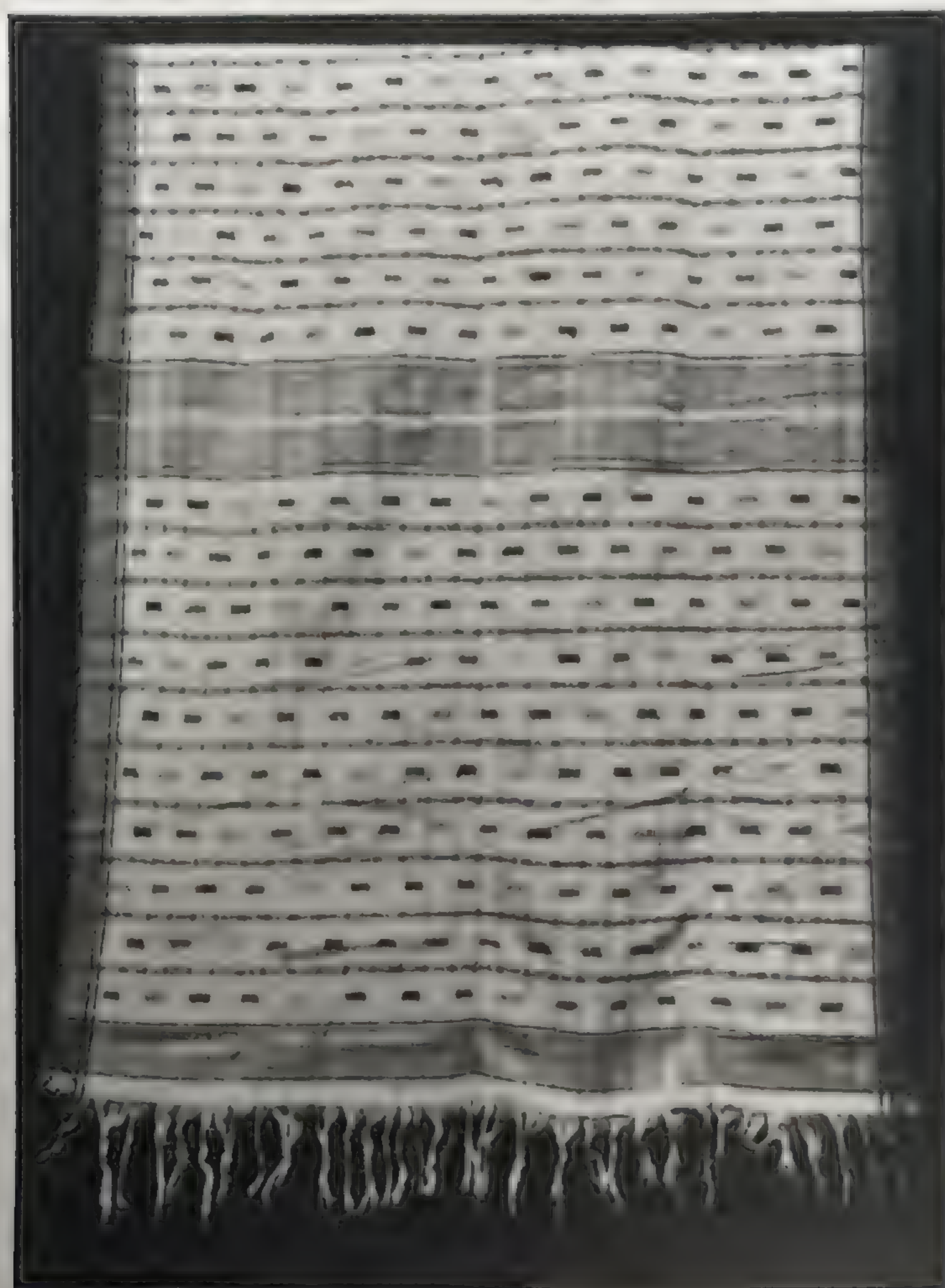
382 A newly created Akwete pattern called fig. This cloth falls into the popo group of patterns.

382





383 A Dada Nwakata cloth, perhaps one of the original designs of the reversible pattern group



384 A Nnadede cloth, named after a famous warrior Chief who was presented with this cloth.

while the design is still admired, it is not considered to have any particular social importance. Most *akwete* cloths, however, are not reversible, their characteristic patterning, based on an inexhaustible number of variations of a limited repertoire of basic motifs, being executed by means of brightly coloured inlay floating on one face of the web and being set into the background on a regular count of eight or sixteen warp threads. The process requires a special shed stick, as well as supplementary heddles.

Modern *akwete* looks at first sight rather different from older examples such as those which can be seen in various museum collections outside Nigeria. Closer examination, however, reveals that the real difference lies in the modern use of shiny yarns of synthetic materials in contrast to the older dyed cottons. The motifs upon which the patterning is based are essentially the same. The modern use of inlay tends to produce a more solid, as well as more glittery, effect than is the case in older cloths. In both, however, pattern is derived from variation in standard motifs of which the *ikaki* motif (tortoise) is one of the most important. This, surely, has a relationship with the motif called *oni* used by the Yoruba weavers of Ijebu-Ode. In the past some of the motifs used in *akwete* were associated with peoples outside the Akwete area who favoured this type of cloth and with the categories of persons, warriors, chiefs and so on, who wore the designs. Thus the *ebe* motif was worn by warriors and chiefs among the people of Opobo; and *ikaki* figures prominently in official Bonny ceremonial. These motifs do not seem to have had any special significance in Akwete itself.

As well as the traditional repertoire of motifs the Akwete weavers are prepared from time to time to adopt motifs from all sorts of external sources. There are cloths, for example, containing the Nigerian State Coat of Arms. Another cloth, known as *air conditioner* and at one time a very fashionable design, was based on the design of an Indian silk. Other cloths which have become fashionable, whether based on tradition or imitation, tend to have equally topical names. There is *sugar*, the basis for a popular cloth called *akajilaku* (hand that has wealth); and there are *oil boom* and *Volvo*. I have often heard it said that cloths woven in Akwete commonly use representational motifs such as the figures of animals. Apart from the use of the Nigerian Coat of Arms (already mentioned) and one or two similar designs, I have seen very little evidence of this kind of patterning in Akwete. Moreover, among



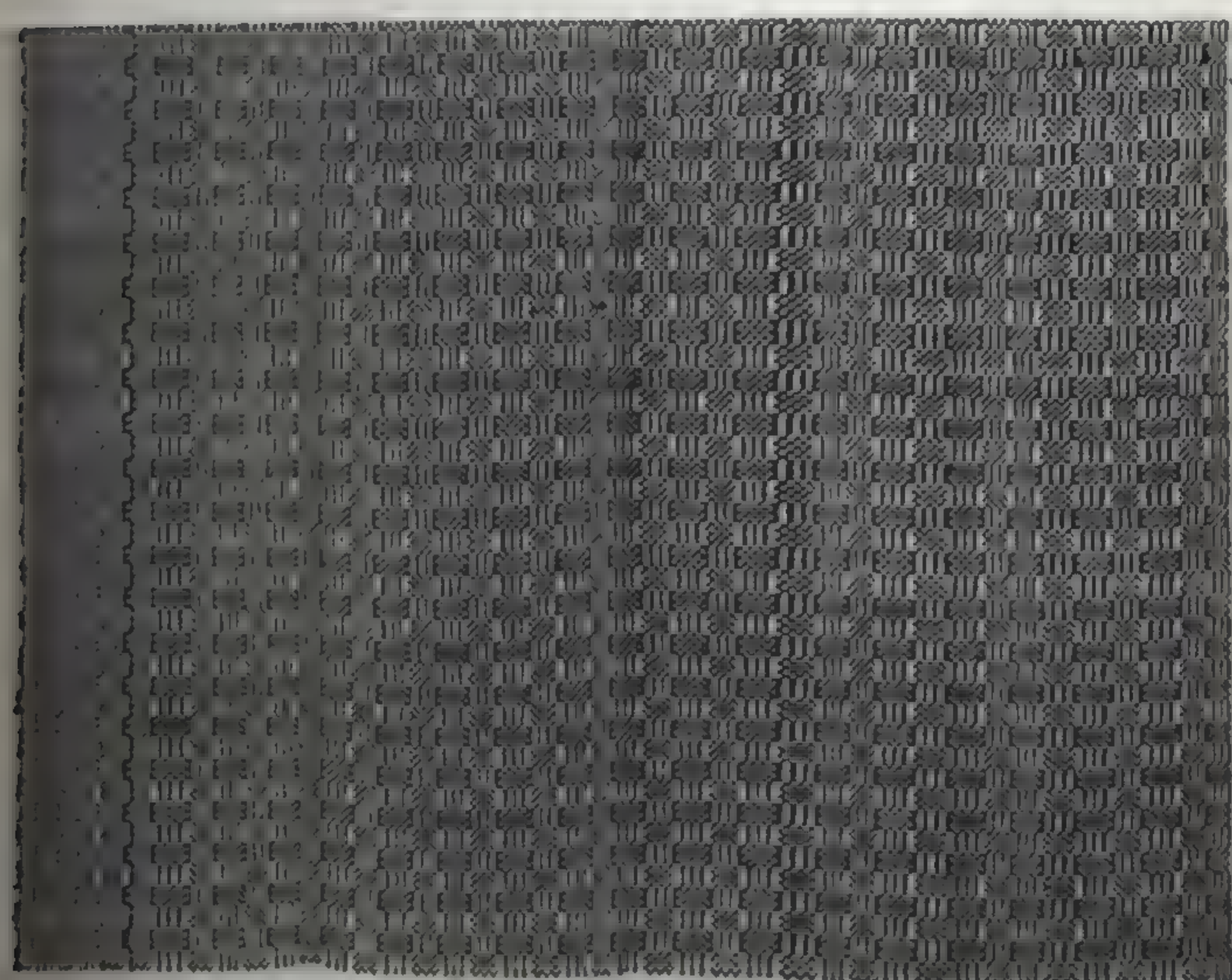
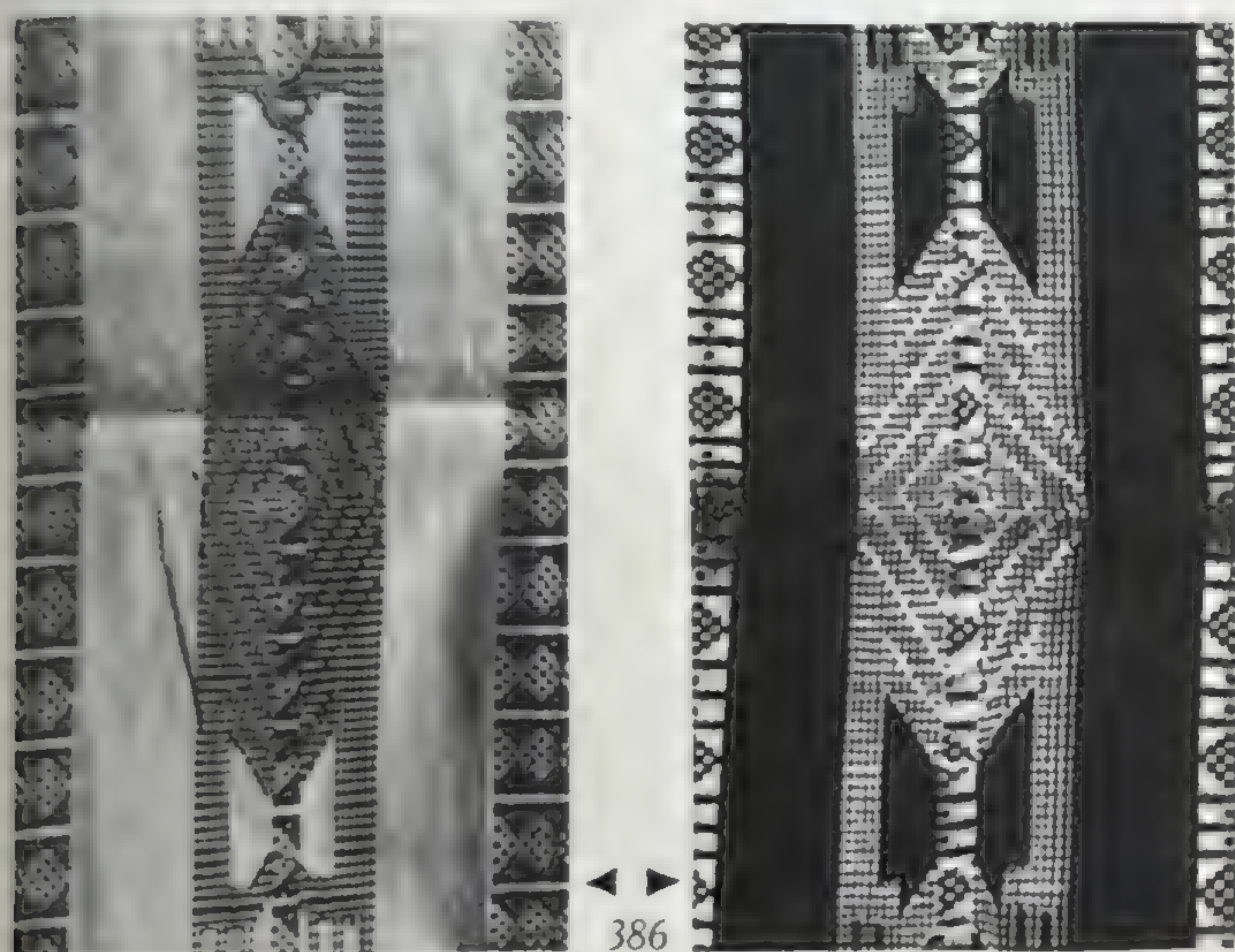
385 Detail of ikaki na okuruepele. There are many variations of the ikaki motif in Akwete.



388 Coat of Arms with star, known as Kpakpanda, an Akwete pattern requiring much skill to execute.

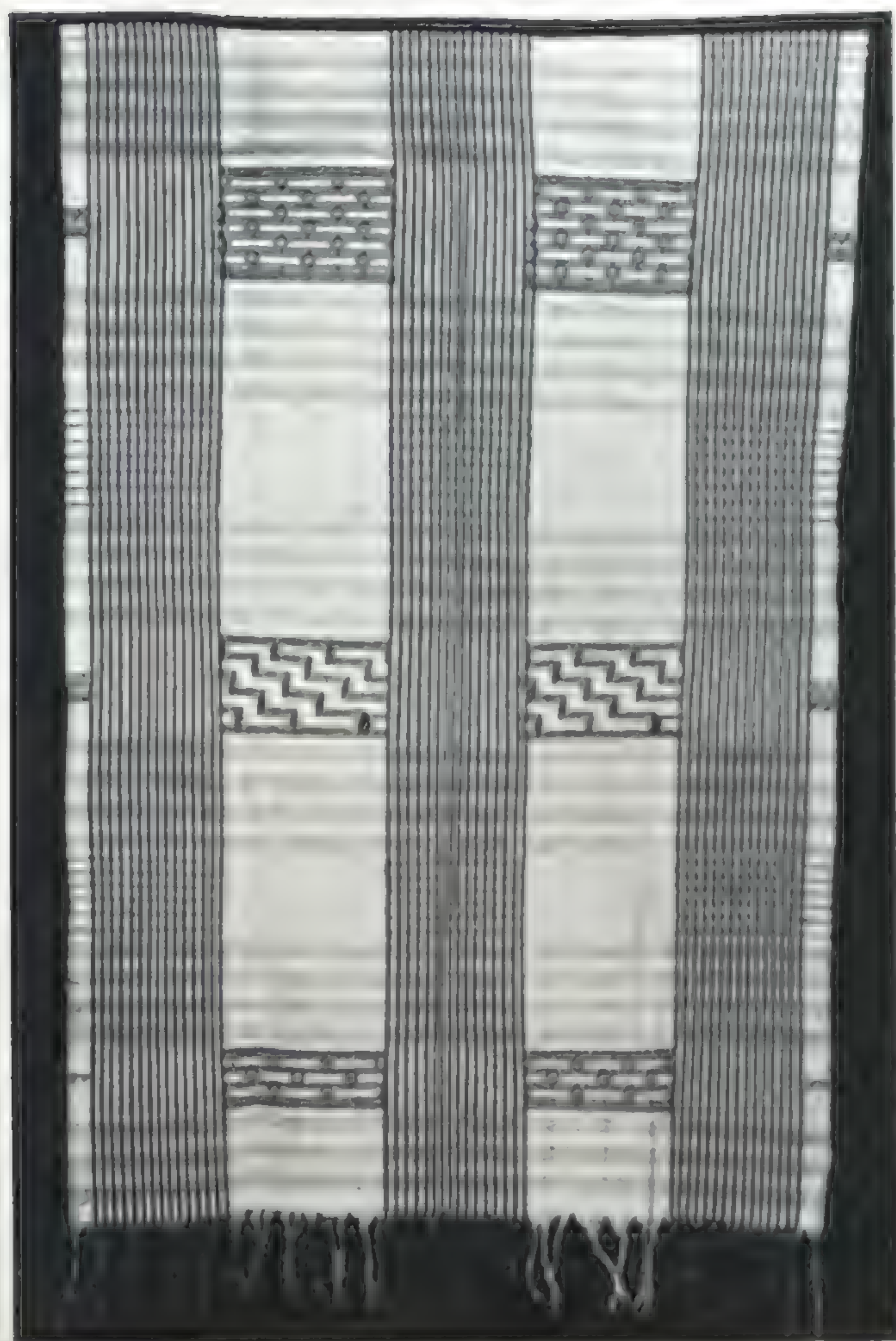
386 Example of reversible weave patterns, showing both sides of the same cloth; seen in some Akwete cloths.

389 A new pattern design called mpekele efere—'broken plate'. Akwete.



387 The Akwete version of the basket weave motif called asia, meaning heddle.





390 An old Akwete cloth with an interesting step pattern, reminiscent of some Asante patterns in Ghana. Beving collection, 1934. British Museum, London

the Beving Collection of cloths from Akwete in the Museum of Mankind in London, made prior to 1934, I found that such motifs were uncommon. The great majority of Akwete designs are abstract, though, as in the case of *ikaki*, they may have a semi-representational origin. *Ikaki* as used by the Ijebu-Ode weavers certainly is anthropomorphic; but in Akwete it has become so stylized as to make this feature obscure.

The other two major Akwete categories, *george* and *popo*, while also capable of much variation, reveal their origins in India and the Ewe tradition clearly enough so as not to require further description here. In addition to the three categories of *george*, *popo* and *akwete*, the last now requiring the explanation *real akwete* to distinguish it from factory made copies – *imported akwete* – the Akwete weavers used to make some rather simple cloths of traditional pattern of black and white warp stripes, the over all effect being that of small checks, and some with the further embellishment of the selvedge stripes with arrays of holes, which really belong to the wider tradition of the Nigerian woman's vertical loom. These are now favoured only by the older members of the community. They are generally woven in machine spun

cotton; but, no doubt, they were originally executed in hand spun yarn. Most cloths from Akwete, of whatever category, are usually woven in pairs of identical design.

Akwete cloth is worn, or 'tied', during all ceremonial occasions including attending church and celebrating the major Christian festivals. Prestige can be established by the use of the most elaborate and expensive cloths. Akwete cloth can also be cut up and tailored into European-style clothing, though to do this is neither particularly common nor popular. In its traditional form, two Akwete cloths are tied by women at the same time. One, *ereghor*, is tied round the waist, and the other, *utukwasi*, is tied under the arms. Along with these two wrappers, of identical design, a blouse *buba*, is now worn. The width of Akwete cloth means that a single panel will serve where with other cloths two panels must be employed. In the Niger Delta region men can also wear Akwete cloth, in this case a single cloth round the waist and along with a shirt of normal European type

Cloth still plays an important part in marriage arrangements in Akwete; but it was of far greater formal significance in the past. Not so long ago the dowry of an Akwete girl would have contained about

391 A very beautiful Akwete cloth woven before 1956, showing unusual anthropomorphic designs. British Museum, London





392 One of the oldest surviving Akwete cloths, woven before 1908. Interesting use of the hourglass motif. Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool.

393 Duna-type Akwete cloth called ipere ndioma—'the knees of the beautiful people'. Beving collection, 1934. British Museum, London.



393



394 Another use of Akwete hourglass pattern. Beving collection, 1934. British Museum, London.

395 Madam Winifred Willie-Harry and her daughter wearing Akwete cloths. The lower cloth is called the eregbor and the upper cloth is the ntukwasi. They always form a pair.



ten pairs of cloths of the *akwete* category as well as a 'box' or trunk filled with *george* cloths, the possession of a large number of cloths still being equated with the possession of wealth. In funeral ceremonies, too, cloth has a role to play. The room in which the body is laid out is hung with cloths provided by the family and friends; and folded cloths are placed on the body. In the past, some cloths would have been buried along with the body, but today this does not seem to happen and cloths displayed at funerals are subsequently returned to their owners. Cloths also are used as means of group identity. As is the case elsewhere in Nigeria, societies and associations in Akwete may have a special cloth design. Talbot tells us that in Kalabari, not far from Akwete, some societies were actually named after the group cloths, some having been woven in Akwete. Now we find group cloths in connection with dance groups and cultural organizations.

Akwete, on the Imo river, has long been a trading town with good water communication with much of the Delta. It is probable that its evolution as a weaving centre is related to its strategic position; and there is a considerable history of Akwete cloth being traded to Opobo, Bonny and elsewhere. One consequence of this commerce we have already noted: the importance of certain Akwete cloths in Bonny ritual. The bulk of the cloth woven today in Akwete is marketed in that town. Even weavers who tend to produce cloths to special order will also have a surplus which they can dispose of in the market. There is here a certain measure of speculation in that the weaver must endeavour to anticipate the shifts and changes of fashion. The Akwete weavers have tried to solve some of their problems of distribution by setting up a marketing association designed both to seek new outlets, including those outside Nigeria, for their cloth, and to establish a uniform price structure for their output. The association in the 1960s constructed a large workroom and a cloth store; and it has worked towards spreading knowledge among its members concerning both weaving techniques and current fashion trends. On the whole, my impression is that this venture has not been an unqualified success. It has marked a major departure from tradition and it has tended to interrupt traditional relationships between weaver and customer. A further problem has been that cloths sold through the association have not always been paid for as promptly as the weavers might wish. Yet another difficulty has arisen from the fact that, while the Akwete weavers are women, yet much of the

middleman marketing arising from the work of the association has been in the hands of men. There is tradition behind this fact which the weavers will have, somehow, to overcome. Finally, it has proved difficult in practice to ensure the stability of price structure in the face of the competitive instincts of the weavers, who, in the last resort, are still prepared to undercut their competitors even if they are fellow association members. It cannot be denied, however, that this Akwete experiment is of great interest; and, if it does succeed, it may provide an inspiration for traditional craftsmen and craftswomen not only in Nigeria but in many other African countries.

The Asabas

In a region roughly defined as a circle of some twenty miles radius centred on Asaba, there are weavers among both Western and Riverain Ibos, as well as a possible admixture of Edo-speakers coming from the west and northern Ibo from over on the eastern side of the Niger river in the region of Onitsha and Nri. Within the term Riverain Ibo, moreover, we must include some measure of Igala influence from the north. Despite this ethnic complexity, however, the Asaba region does produce cloths which deserve to be considered as a category in their own right. As early as 1854 Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther noted many 'fancy cloths' from this area on sale in Onitsha market which, he said, were the work of Ibo weavers in the general locality. Onitsha, of course, is on the east bank of the Niger directly opposite Asaba.⁷

Asaba weaving differs in many ways from that at Akwete. It is not directed towards a wider market: it produces traditional cloths for local traditional uses. The Asaba output is dominated by the use of a white background decorated with inlay. There is an interesting possible relationship here with Benin, where a white background is common in ceremonial cloths, in contrast to Akwete where other colours predominate.

The craft is concentrated mainly in Asaba and the nearby town of Uburu-Uku. Not all women weave here as a matter of course: rather, weaving has tended to become the work of specialists, usually members of families which have woven for many generations. My fieldwork suggested that there were (1979) about sixty women weaving in Uburu-Uku, some twenty in Asaba, and a few more in other villages. Some of the weavers, notably in Uburu-Uku, take in girls from non-weaving families as apprentices.



396 An Asaba carpentered loom, situated on the house verandah.

The women in this area control all aspects of their craft including the marketing of their cloth. Some weavers work on a full-time basis; but others, who have acquired different professional skills, may weave only from time to time. Madam Attoh, with whom I talked on weaving matters, is a good example of a craftswoman here. At the age of ten she went to Uburu-Uku to learn weaving. She then returned to her home town of Asaba to work primarily as a school teacher. Today, she does some weaving in her own spare time: she encourages girls in her school to learn weaving, and she has made sure that her own daughters have learnt to do so. She gives, in fact, practical demonstrations of weaving in her classroom, where she has arranged for the setting up of an easily movable loom. Madam Attoh told me that she had a repertoire of thirteen basic patterns, including *leke-leke*, or basket-weave, which, though not traditional to Asaba, is widely used for baby ties. Madam Attoh made her personal loom with her own hands, with the exception of the sword, which was carved out of hardwood by her brother. Like so many other Nigerian woman weavers, Madam Attoh attached special importance to the sword, which she will make sure gets handed down to one of her daughters.

The Asaba loom resembles more closely those used outside the Ibo-speaking area than that found in

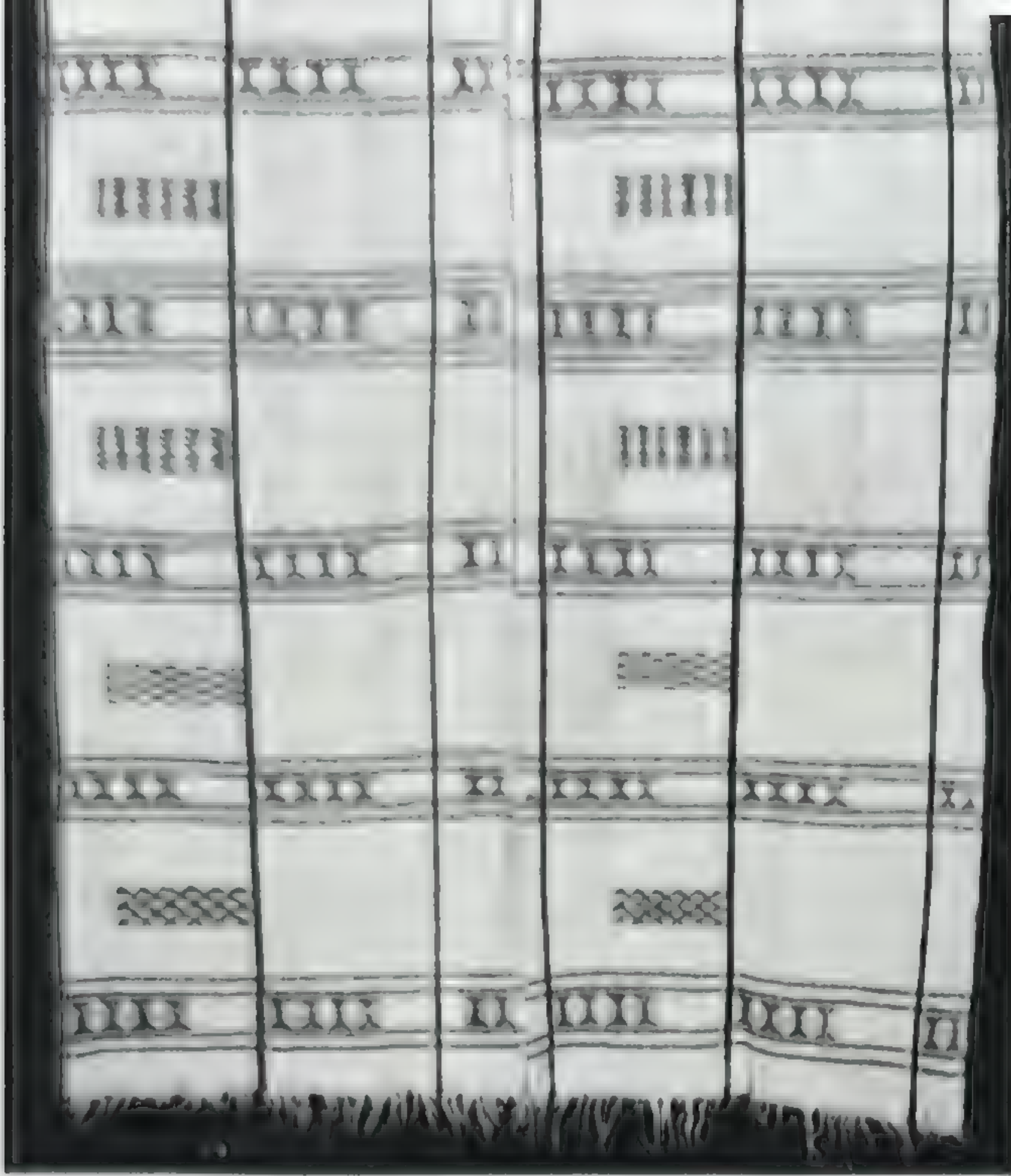
Akwete. A particular Asaba feature is a heddle made with a cane as heddle stick or sticks instead of the usual raffia rib. The loom has an extra shed stick to facilitate inlay work. The sword is usually made from the wood of the *udala* tree (which the Yoruba call *agbalumo*). The sword handle is often carved with a design of notched triangles. The sword has a very long life indeed, and several generations will use it. The rest of the loom in Asaba lasts for about ten years, after which all the major components will have to be replaced. One feature which Asaba shares with Akwete is the use of a small metal tool called *ukoti*, which is used for straightening warp threads and lifting inlay threads. The loom in Asaba can be located either indoors or on a house verandah. We found in this area several portable looms made by carpenters. One such was the loom, already mentioned, which Madam Attoh used to set up in her classroom to demonstrate weaving methods.

The following are the names for loom parts used by the Asaba:

- nnsu*—the loom (with uprights)
- ukpoko*—horizontal beams
- afia*—heddle
- apilipa apilipa*—sword
- ute*—tenter
- okpa*—shuttle
- ngugu*—shed sticks
- ngbele*—supplementary shed sticks

It is interesting that these names differ so much from those used for loom parts in Akwete.

Traditional Asaba cloths, *aguba*, are woven with a very finely spun cotton, and many of these cloths, particularly those worn by the older women and the men, have no colour decoration. Ceremonial cloths, *aguba ocha*, are decorated with patterns of holes, either in a triangular arrangement, *aja*, or a block, *nkpapu*. The design can be further elaborated by means of stripes or bands of thickened weft: these are known as *okpota*. Another group of Asaba cloths have inlay float designs of highly stylized motifs such as hourglass (*ugbo-okwe*), double ended pestle (*akangweose*), tortoise (*mbekuri*) and check design (*leke-leke*). These inlays, regularly arranged in bands, are sufficiently thinly executed so as not to obscure the predominantly white feature of the cloth background. In some older cloths, however, I have seen inlay more block-like than outline in effect to give an over all red and black impression. Some younger weavers, moreover, are



397 A ceremonial cloth woven over twenty years ago, consisting of the finest spun yarn and delicate inlay designs worked in vegetable dyed yarns of red and black. Asaba.



398 An Ibo ceremonial cloth from Asaba called *aguba ocha*, with *aja* holes built into triangles.

experimenting with rayon and lurex, but in patterns which are not considered local to Asaba and are, indeed, usually referred to as 'Akwete' patterns. Most Asaba cloths end in fringes which are knotted (*ukwu-ukwu*, meaning 'fowl's legs') or fixed by a row of chaining just above the fringe (*egoayaka*, meaning 'cowrie').

Asaba cloth, as has already been noted, is woven for local use. It plays an important part in burial

ceremonies where the mourners are expected to wear local cloths, preferably made from hand spun cotton. The room in which the body is laid out is hung with cloths with a white background and red and black inlay floats. Cloths are also by tradition worn by participants at weddings and other ceremonies and festivals. It would seem that here, on the whole, the use of cloth is a matter of etiquette rather than deeper ritual significance.

Men around Asaba can wear a cloth of two panels round their waists and a cloth of three panels worn over one shoulder in the toga manner. Women usually wear a pair of two panel cloths as wrappers, *akwa*, one round the waist and one tied under the arms. The second, or upper, wrapper is usually made from panels somewhat narrower than those in the lower wrapper. A third cloth is sometimes worn as a head tie, but it is usually of a design different from the wrappers.

In the Asaba region the respect for traditional cloths does not seem to be on the wane. Skilled weavers get all the orders they can handle. The old respect, moreover, for hand spun local cotton has survived. Even today, while much of the work of spinning is carried out by the older women, most girls know how to spin and can, if the need should arise, produce yarn of good quality. The methods of spinning here are much as elsewhere. Sometimes cotton reels are used as whorls and sometimes one can find the dried fruit from the *ude* tree used for this purpose. Until recently cotton was grown both around Asaba and Uburu-Uku; but today the main supply comes from the latter place from which it generally reaches Asaba ready spun.

Owerri

In the Owerri district, in Imo State to the northwest of Akwete, there were until quite recently a significant number of weavers. Of late, however, the introduction of a broadloom workshop seems to have served as a disincentive to the craft, which has much declined. The Owerri weavers really should be classed as an outpost of the craft found at Akwete. Their looms are like those at Akwete, though generally employing a slightly narrower web and weaving patterns which involve but a few supplementary heddles, perhaps no more than three. A few looms in Owerri used the Akwete-type warp spreader; but the majority of the looms which I saw there did not have this device and relied, instead, on rather peculiar tenters, wide and flat, which required the use of safety pins to keep them

in place. Akwete-type cloths, including *george*, which is the most popular, are woven here. There is an interesting design, also, which involves a bird-like motif executed in inlay float. Owerri cloths, on the whole, do not compare in quality to those woven in Akwete.

Abakaliki

The people of the Abakaliki region of Anambra State are part of the northeastern Ibo (or Ogun Uku) group. Nkalagu, Nkalap Iha, Ezamgbo and Ngbo are probably the main centres of weaving here.⁸ The Ngbo group appears to have intermingled somewhat with the Igala. Cloth woven here, Ngbo, is widely distributed in the whole Abakaliki district. There are some parallels both in the manner of wearing cloth, for example the male custom of knotting a cloth round the waist instead of a loin cloth, and in its design which recall the usage of the Tiv who, after all, are not so far to the north of the Abakaliki region.⁹

The cloth which I have seen from this area is of hand spun cotton. The dominant design is a white background with indigo blue stripes of varying widths. Indigo is known here as *allu* or *allulu*. The main uses are local, for example as loin cloths and towels.

I was able to examine a number of looms in the Abakaliki area in late 1979. These were in villages around Ngbo, very near the border between Anambra and Benue States and not so far away from the country occupied by the Tiv people. The looms were in many respects more like those of the Hausa than those of the main body of Ibo-speaking weavers. The uprights, for example, were made from forked branches. An interesting feature was the use of a warp spreader rather like that of the Akwete loom except that the notches did not slope away from the centre. Two weaving swords were used, which doubled as shed sticks. These looms were the smallest that I saw in Nigeria: they were just over three feet high and under four feet wide.

The following are some terms used for looms and loom parts in the Ngbo area:

ogboro egwo—loom
mba—sword
nza—warp spreader
okara—shuttle
eya—heddle
nkporo—spindle (for spinning)



399 An Ibo weaver from the Ngbo group, near Abakaliki. One of the few remaining in the district. This is one of the smallest of the woman's looms in Nigeria, measuring 38 inches × 42 inches.

owu—cotton
amama—cloth

Nsukka

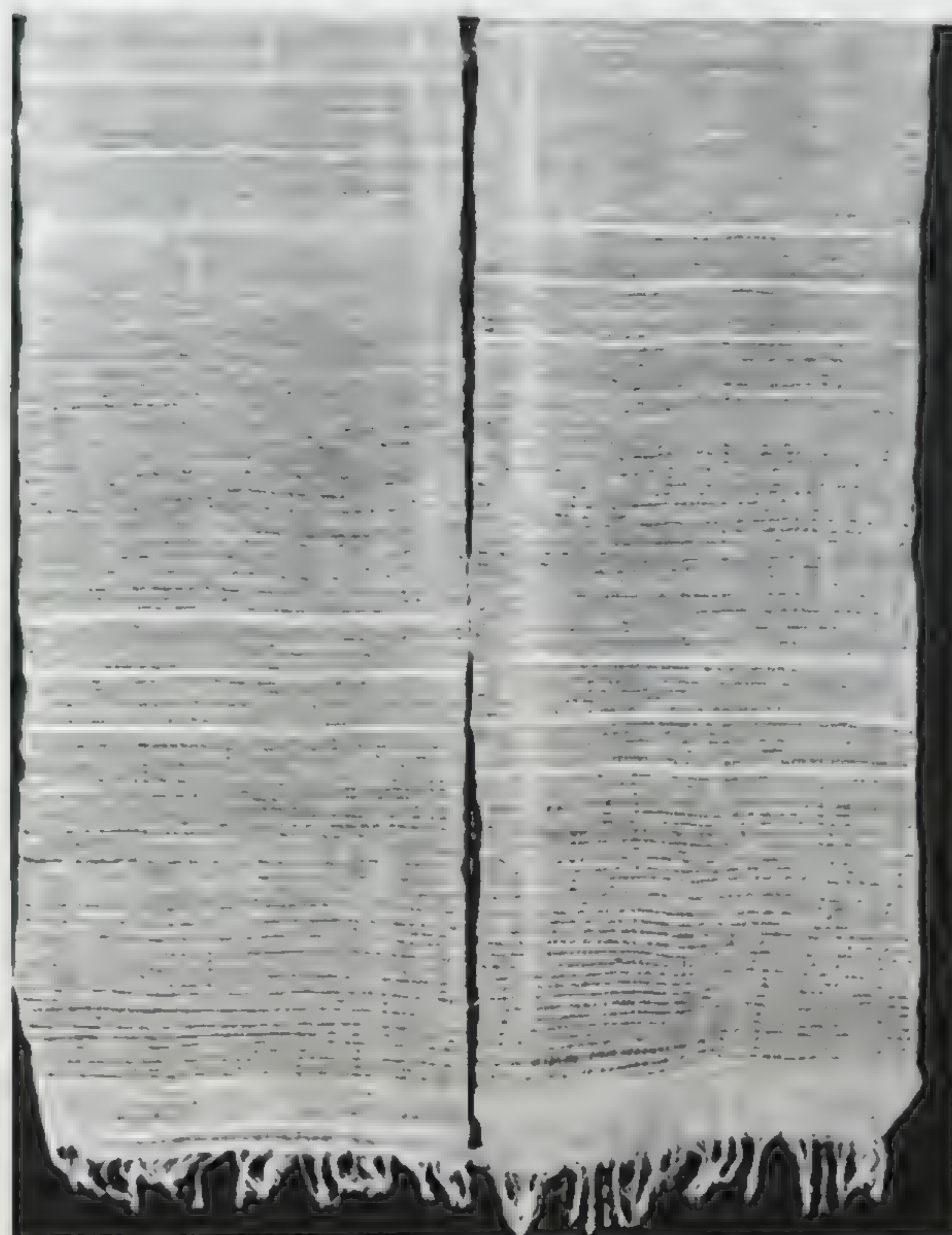
There are some women weavers in the region of Nsukka in Anambra State. There is some evidence to suggest that there exists here some Igala influence from the north. Weavers use both hand spun and factory made cotton yarn, the latter being termed *akwa-ori*, 'cloth of fine thread'. In contrast to both Akwete and Asaba, the Nsukka weavers base their patterning on warp stripes to which can be added inlays of designs closer to the Igbara than to the major Ibo weaving groups to the south. The Nsukka name for heddle is *ahia*, as in Akwete; and the Nsukka weavers call the special shed sticks which are used for patterning by the term *paapaa*, which in Akwete would be used for the supplementary heddles which serve much the same purpose. The looms used here are similar to those in the Asaba region.

One of the most characteristic cloths of this area is of hand spun cotton dyed reddish brown with camwood, *Pterocarpus tinctorius*. The yarn is plied, something uncommon in the Nigerian context. These cloths are rather small, being about fourteen inches wide and between four and five feet long. Some have a warp faced patterning with a count of 24 to the inch and a pick of eight throws to the inch. Others have a plain tabby weave. These cloths are used as towels and also have a part to play in masquerades. We found them on sale in a special section of Enugu market where also on sale were musical instruments, equipment for masquerades and herbal medicine.



400 (left) A Tiv man wearing a woman's weave cloth called a *gbagbir*. Oteshi, near Gboko

401 A Tiv cloth of the *ashisha* type, possibly woven on the frame ground loom used by Tiv men. See Chapter 5, page 165



400

401

The Tiv

There are Tiv women weavers in a number of places in Benue State, mainly in villages around Gboko and Katsina Ala, so our fieldwork in 1979 would indicate. Cloth is woven for use by both women and men. There is a male garment consisting of a cloth of three panels, *gbagbir*, which is worn in a toga-like manner as a most formal and traditional dress. The cloth for *gbagbir* is normally woven from hand spun cotton with colour provided by indigo dye. The weave is rather loose, and the patterning often involves a wide selvedge stripe of dark indigo plus an array of narrow stripes of lighter indigo. *Gbagbir*, so I was told by an old farmer in Ipiav, was the correct male attire for all public occasions, from visits to the market to formal ceremonies. There were varieties of this cloth, we were informed, that were considered more ceremonial than others and only worn on special occasions. A *gbagbir* cloth in normal use would last about four years.

Cloths woven by Tiv women are on sale in small quantities in a number of rural markets, at Agbo, Ihugh and Adikpa for example; but the indications were that this was a craft very much on the wane like, indeed, male weaving among the Tiv on the horizontal loom. In Gboko itself, the Tiv metropolis, the central



402 A masquerade cloth from Enugu market, possibly of Hausa origin and dyed locally.

market revealed to us no Tiv cloths, either male or female, on sale, though we did find a number of stalls which held quite large stocks of cloth woven in Okene, some of which had patterns evocative of those traditional to the Tiv.

Medicinal, magical, and masquerade cloths

All over West Africa one comes across a conviction that cloth possesses properties of a kind which can only be described as magical or medicinal. Such properties are clearly important in the preparation of garments for masquerades where the performance creates some kind of link between the world of the spirit and the world of the flesh. The idea that certain kinds of cloth, or cloths with certain designs, have medicinal properties is extremely interesting. It is common in Nigeria, but it can also be found in most other West African countries. We have encountered in Upper Volta, for example, the weaving (in narrow strip) of certain designs, including a variant of the basket weave 'guineafowl' or 'tortoise' pattern, to produce garments or pieces of cloth which, if worn or carried, will help in specific medical conditions.¹⁰ We



403 A scene in Enugu market, showing the masquerade and medicinal section. Note use of local cloths here.

have also been told of similar beliefs in operation in the north of Sierra Leone.¹¹ These ideas, it should be emphasized, are by no means peculiar to Africa. Europeans, too, until very recently adhered to very strong views on this subject. The first British colonial administrators who made their way into the Nigerian interior could well have worn spine pads, pieces of thick woollen cloth, designed to ward off the effects of sunstroke. Indeed, it was only in World War II that it was discovered that the pith helmet was not essential to avert the evils of excessive exposure to the rays of the tropical sun.

In most parts of Nigeria we found sections of markets where bits of cloth were sold along with other substances of medicinal or ritual importance. The main market at Enugu had a particularly interesting section where special cloths, special substances, special musical instruments and masquerade costumes were sold. Among the cloths were many varieties which were probably woven in the neighbourhood of Nsukka. But there were other cloths of less certain provenance as well. A study of this market enabled us to make some general observations on this use of cloth.

Some cloths, notably those from the Nsukka region,

could be sold not only as panels but also in specially made up forms for use in masquerades. For example, there was an object looking rather like a long sausage, made from cloth characteristic of the Nsukka area, which, we discovered, could be worn as part of the Nwunwu masquerade which is performed at Christmas time. Again, there were odd lengths of narrow strip cloth, perhaps a pair—one white and the other deep indigo blue—knotted together at one end: these, apparently, had talismanic properties. Yet again, there was a two-panel cloth with a most dramatic pattern of white rings on an indigo blue background executed by a tie-dye technique which was evocative of Edo practice. Finally, we encountered a two-panel cloth of undyed cotton executed in an open weave technique which reminded us of similar cloths much valued by the Gbari and the Tiv. Some of these cloths could be traced to their source easily enough, many to the Nsukka region. Others had reached Enugu by round-about routes, often via Onitsha market. Their presence at Enugu, in this special part of the market, indicated the complexity of the trade in these special medicinal cloths. In this respect Enugu market gave us a valuable insight into one mechanism which has served to ensure the survival of some cloth designs and, by the same token, some handloom industries, in many a remote corner of Nigeria.

Notes

¹ For Ijebu-Ode cloth, see Chapter 7. For a study of Ewe cloths generally, see: V. Lamb, *West African Weaving*, London 1975. The early history of the Delta cloth trade is discussed by Ryder. See: A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans 1485–1897*, London 1969, p. 234.

² P. A. Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 2nd ed., London 1967, p. 278.

³ M. Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, London 1897, reprinted London 1965, p. 735, contains an illustration of an Akwete loom with a george cloth mounted on it.

⁴ See Chapter 12.

⁵ See Chapter 12.

⁶ Talbot, *Niger Delta*, op. cit., p. 278.

⁷ S. A. Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers undertaken by McGregor Laird in connection with the British Government in 1854*, London 1855, reprinted London 1970, p. 179.

⁸ For some account of the peoples of this region, see: D. Forde & G. I. Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-speaking Peoples of South-eastern Nigeria*, London 1950, reprinted 1967, p. 57.

See also: C. S. Okeke, 'Traditions and Changes in Igbo Woven Designs', *Nigeria Magazine*, 1976.

⁹ See: Forde & Jones, op. cit., p. 59.

¹⁰ Personal communication from W. Pinfold.

¹¹ Personal communication from Simon Ottenberg.



404 A Hausa cloth trader in the northern market of Chafe. His stock appears to come mainly from the southern regions of Keffi and Nasarawa. Both adire and domina cloths are on display.

Northern Nigeria

Of all the regions of Nigeria where women weave on the vertical loom, it was our experience that northern Nigeria presented the most difficulties. The ethnic map of this vast area is complex in the extreme. Many weavers work in remote villages. The Moslem customs of seclusion often serve to conceal their activities from the eye of the foreign observer. In many regions marriage produces a great mobility of women so that a weaving tradition acquired in one place could well turn up somewhere else a long way away. Our fieldwork covered in varying degree all the northern States, Sokoto, Niger, Kaduna, Kano, Bauchi and Borno. We found women weavers among Hausa-speakers in a large number of places, for example in the area marked out by Kaduna, Zaria, Katsina and Gusau; and we found weavers particularly concentrated in and around Batsari, Sale-Fawa, Dutsin-Ma, Kwatark-washi, Bungudu, Anka and Soba to the south of Zaria. We also found weavers in Bauchi State in and around Bauchi, Kangare, Misau and Gombe as well as Tula and Kumo. In Borno and Adamawa (Gongola State) we failed to find any evidence of Kanuri women using the vertical loom, though here, too, we came across Hausa-speakers and Fulani who did.

Our impression was that there were two basic categories of weaving area. In one the craft had been established for some time and there were many weavers in any one family and many weaving families in the region. In the other there were more or less isolated weavers, who probably had moved fairly recently from somewhere else. In Zaria, for example, there were many women weavers; and it was clear that the craft had been well established here for a long time. In Gombe we managed to locate but two weaving families, neither of Gombe origin and both with their

weaving skills derived from Kano. A similar pattern could be detected in small towns and villages. At Tillitawa near Misau every house had its weaver or weavers; and in Sale-Fawa, south of Katsina, we were told that there were at least a hundred and fifty weavers. Yet in Batsari, only a few miles away, there were only two weavers, both Fulani who had married recently and were new to the village. It was quite common to find a village with no women weavers at all, or one where a solitary weaver was at work in isolation.

The majority of women weavers in northern Nigeria work within the enclosing walls of their family compounds. These are not always easy for the outsider to enter, and our survey here must, inevitably, be based on what we saw in households where we were allowed in through the kindness of the head of the family. We visited one such compound at Bungudu, in Sokoto State, where we encountered four women weavers. The family was quite prosperous. Weaving was undertaken not for the market but solely to meet domestic needs. It transpired that two of the women, both Hausa, had learned to work as children, and, on joining this family through marriage, they taught two of their new relatives. In another compound, in Zaria, we found a total of eight looms. Here the women wove not only for their family but also for the market. A trader would visit the compound at intervals and collect such cloths as were available for sale from the head of the household.

In some villages we found an active weaving industry, with women of all ages at work for, essentially, the market. Here, by the age of ten nearly all the girls had learnt to weave and were practising this craft along with their schooling. It was not



405 A Hausa market near Gusau, selling hand spun local cotton.

uncommon in such situations to find Hausa and Fulani women weaving side by side and, indeed, to find that intermarriage between the two had virtually made the distinction between them irrelevant.

The loom

The loom which we encountered during our research in northern Nigeria was basically of the same type throughout the area, though the names for some of its parts varied in detail from place to place, and there were regional differences in the cloths woven on it. The weaving sword appeared to have the same kind of value attached to it which we have already noted among the other Nigerian weaving groups discussed in this book. In different places it was made from different woods. In Bauchi State, for example, we found swords made of *tanni*, which we were told was the wood of the tamarind tree. In Sokoto State it was not uncommon to find swords made from *kade* wood, from the shea tree. These swords, after carving, were carefully treated with groundnut oil over a period of many days

to give them a smooth and glossy surface. Some of these swords had a simple knot pattern carved on the handle end. The loom is warped up, usually, with two shed sticks, and a third is added only if inlay or pile is to be woven. When hand spun yarn is being woven, a double thread is used for each count, but with factory yarn, the count is four threads. Some looms in northern Nigeria which we encountered used forked branches as uprights, with the upper horizontal beam being located in the forks. Looms, moreover, were often of lesser height than elsewhere in Nigeria, except in the Abakaliki region of Anambra State, no doubt because of the lower roof levels prevailing in many northern Nigerian houses.

The following are some Hausa terms relating to the woman's vertical loom:

- kayan saka*—the whole loom
- masaka mata*—loom frame
- dirka*—upright with a natural fork
- tukurwa dirka*—upper horizontal beam
- akwasa* or *akwasha*—sword
- ite*—tenter
- andira* or *allera*—heddle
- danjafa* or *kwarkwaro*—shuttle
- zube*—warp threads
- sakakke*—weft or web
- yan kore biyu*—main shed sticks Nos. 1 and 2
- dan tsinta*—main shed stick No. 3



406

406 A Hausa weaver from Misau, where only thick hand spun cloths are woven. The woman works inside her cool hut. 408 (right) Hausa loom with carpentered frame in Takum, near the Cameroun border.



407 Hausa women spinning under a shady tree in Kwatarkwashi. Spinning here is a daily activity, with the cotton being in abundant supply.

Spinning and yarns

While factory yarns and synthetics including lurex are quite common, the main yarn used on the vertical loom in northern Nigeria is still hand spun cotton. Spinning remains an important activity in the life of many Hausa women. As Polly Hill observed, writing of the village of Batagarawa near Katsina:

Spinning is pursued by some 85 per cent of all women in Batagarawa, as virtually their only craft or pastime; the raw cotton is bought, the thread (*zare*) sold, outside the village, where the craft of weaving is nearly extinct. The primitive clay spindle (*mazari*) being used, output and earnings are very small.

She added that, according to a census carried out in 1931, about two thirds of the female population in six Katsina districts put as their sole occupation 'spinning'.¹

The Hausa spindle, *mazari*, consists of a raffia rib stick and a clay whorl decorated with a design of concentric circles; and it is similar to spindles elsewhere in Nigeria. During spinning the carded cotton is held on a stick called *shauri*. A lubricant is used, either a substance made from burnt and powdered bones, *alli* (which we saw at Gusau), or from a mixture of gypsum and the sap of certain local tree (which we saw in Kumo), this being called *allin*.

Two basic kinds of thread are spun. First, a highly spun cotton thread called *zare*, which is used for warp threads. Second, a more loosely spun yarn called *abawa*, which is used for the weft. The spun thread is wound on to storage spindles which, when full, are often sent to the market for sale. Should it be necessary to dye the yarn, there are two options open. Either the



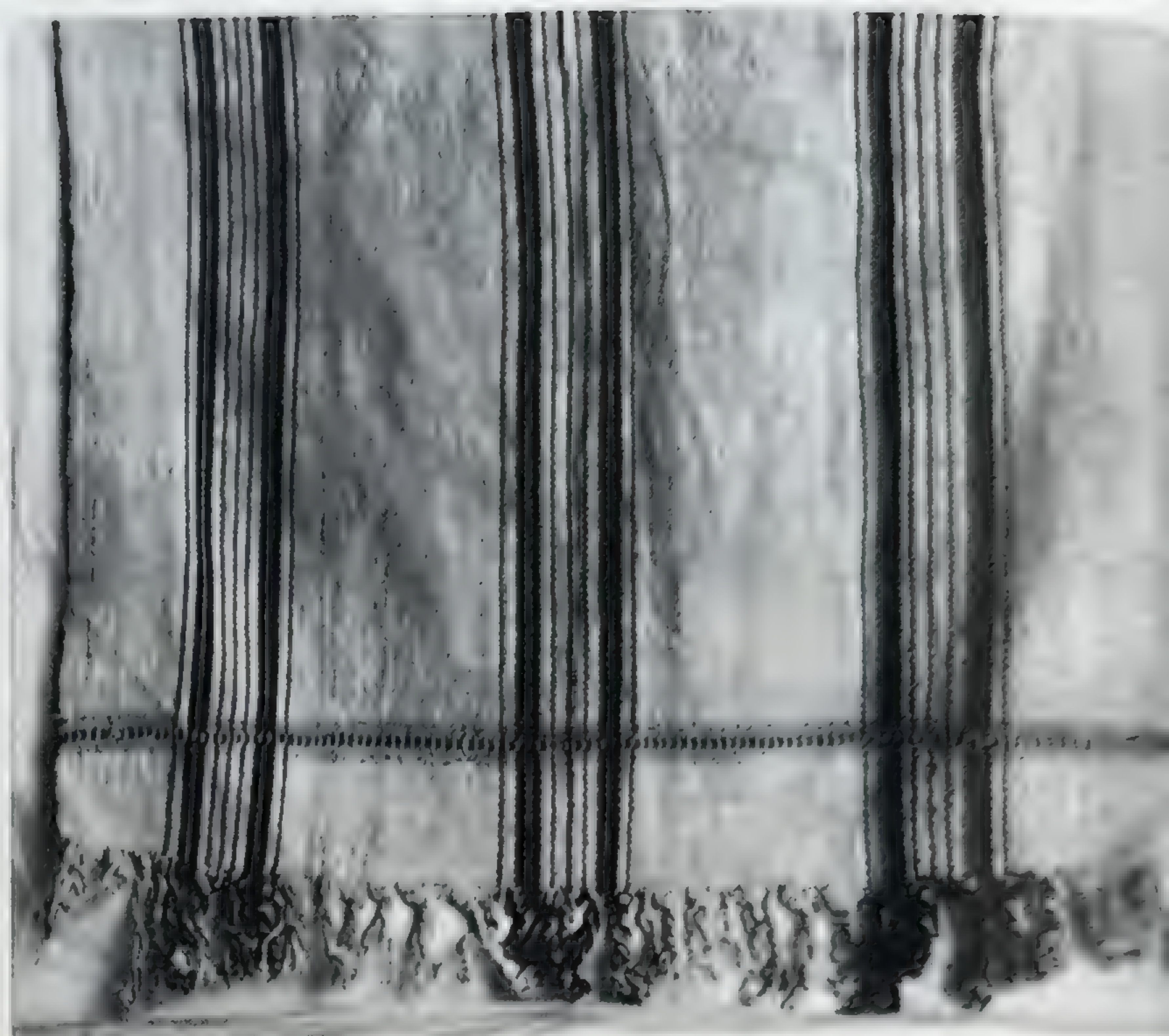
undyed yarn can be sent to the men dyers at the nearest local dyepits, or the woman can do her own dyeing or, indeed, do dye work for her friends and neighbours since dyeing is a craft requiring special skills. We met one such woman dyer at Kumo, near Gombe. In large earthenware pots in her compound she was dyeing in two colours, indigo blue (*baba*) and a yellow (*rawaya*) dye made from the root of a shrub, *Cochlospermum tinctorium*. The availability and use of a local natural dye of yellow colour no doubt goes far to explain the popularity of this colour today in factory made cotton cloths in northern Nigeria.

While hand spun yarns still predominate in the countryside, in the towns various factory made yarns have become increasingly popular. We found in 1978 and 1979 many markets with locally woven baby ties, *majayi*, for sale woven from factory yarn. Some of these had both narrow weft bands of colour decoration and a central piled section, clearly derived in inspiration from the baby ties woven by the Yoruba and in Okene, and generally of inferior quality.

Factory yarns also appear in cloths of good quality intended for use as wrappers, *zane*. One variety, woven in a black and white check design and called *dagwalo*, a Hausa word implying black, is very popular. It may well be a version, on the vertical loom, of a Hausa cloth woven on the horizontal loom and known as *arkilla*. Some *zane* wrappers are now being woven with lurex, called in northern Nigeria *siliki*, incorporated into the warp. *Siliki*, also so popular elsewhere in Nigeria and particularly among both male and female Yoruba weavers, has spread rapidly in northern Nigeria in recent years. A young woman weaver in Gombe told me that it was in the last decade that the trend had been away from hand spun yarn to factory made yarn and then to *siliki*. Our impression was that while in the rural areas hand spun cotton still remains the major yarn, in the towns it is so rapidly being replaced by factory made alternatives that it will soon all but disappear.

Cloth types

As one would expect from the size of the region, northern Nigeria produces a wide range of cloth designs with an equally wide range of names. The following section lists some of these names and the cloths to which they refer. It should be remembered, however, that the same cloth may well have different names in different places.



409 A typical Hausa cloth known as kallabi, woven in Zaria.

410 A Hausa weaver in Gombe, working in her room. This weaver is experimenting with lurex yarn for the first time. Behind her can be seen her bride wealth in the array of enamel bowls.





411 Example of Hausa basket weave, from Zaria, here called *gidan albasa*—'this very house of the onion'.

Arigidi is used by weavers in Zaria and Misau to refer to traditional cloth woven from hand spun cotton. The term is by no means universal throughout northern Nigeria; and in some places it may be taken, as Abraham suggests in his Hausa dictionary, to mean a cloth woven by the Yoruba.²

Dan tofi is the name for a single-panel cloth traditionally worn by women as an undergarment; and *zane* is a two-panel outer wrapper.

Fari, with the general meaning 'white', is a term applied to certain cloths which are completely white. *Kujeran gwado-fari*, for example, is a single panel white cloth used as a chair cover.

Kallabi can be a cloth used as a head cover, usually of white background with groups of narrow coloured warp stripes.

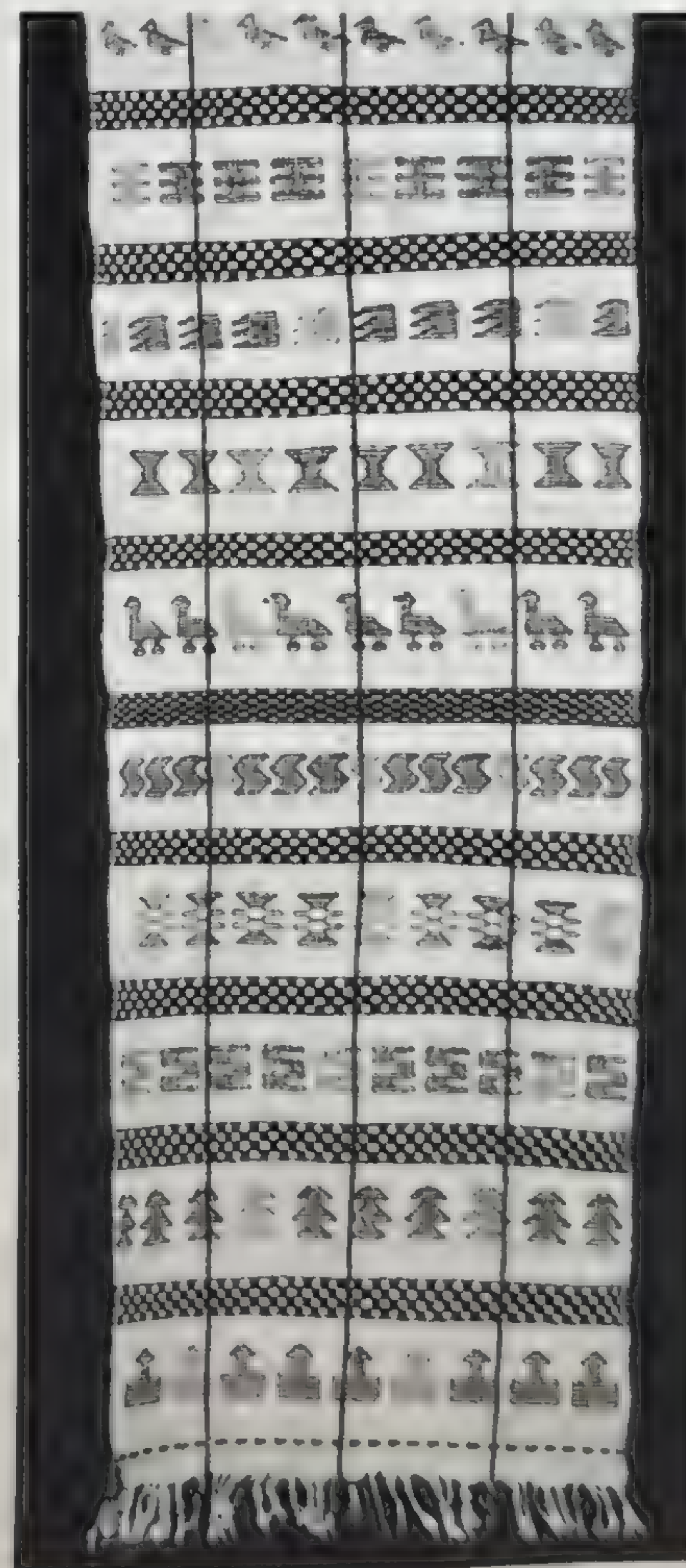
Gwado is another cloth term with a number of applications. Generally white, perhaps with blue warp stripes, it can be used to refer to a two-panel cloth used as a cover for young children. *Babban gwado* can refer to a three-panel general purpose cover cloth; or it can be used to describe a large pile of *gwado* cloths on sale in the market. *Gwado* is involved in many meanings relating to cloth use, especially where a cloth of particular strength is required as in saddle blankets and sacks for storing grain.

In northern Nigeria, as elsewhere in the country, the woman's vertical loom produces cloths with a basket

weave pattern. Such cloth in Zaria can be called *gidan albasa*, literally 'this very house of the onion', the reference being to the checks, each, so to speak, a square suitable for the planting of an onion. In one village in Bauchi State we found the same design called *bayan konkuru*, 'the back of the tortoise', a description which, indeed, has been applied to this kind of cloth in a variety of regional West African languages throughout an area of some two million square miles of West Africa from Senegal to Cameroun, the region of the West African narrow strip weaving complex involving the male horizontal loom. Presumably it is from this source that the design has been borrowed by the women users of the vertical loom in Nigeria.

What would seem to be a fairly recent departure from the traditions of the vertical loom in northern Nigeria has been the use of designs executed in outline in inlay patterning. Red and black are the most common colours, on a white background; but yellow and blue can also be introduced. The motifs in these inlays are usually simplified forms of motifs found elsewhere in

412 Example of a Hausa cloth from Zaria, exhibiting animal motifs. Similar cloths can be seen in the Berlin Museum.





413 Trousers seen in Kankara market. The cloth comes from Keffi and Abaji districts to the south. The cloth is a *domina* type.

Nigeria, for example Akwete and Ijebu-Ode. Usually the designs are abstract and non-representational; but representational motifs are possible. There also exist a number of what might be called transitional cloths in that their designs indicate close links with the cloths of other groups. For example, in Nasarawa, Keffi and Idah there exists a category of cloth known as *domina* which has certainly influenced Hausa weavers. It can be argued that *domina* cloths are a link between the patterning of such elaborate cloths as *duna* and the kind of design usually associated with the term Hausa. *Domina* cloths are not only used for women's wrappers and the like (mainly in northern Nigeria), but also can be cut up and tailored into smocks and trousers. *Domina* cloths from Nasarawa and Keffi enjoy a good market among the pastoral Fulani of the north. We have found this kind of cloth on sale in all sorts of unexpected places, for example in markets on the Jos plateau; and it can be seen in most markets attended by the Bororo Fulani.

Yet another cloth category, to which reference has already been made, is that of *majayi*, baby ties. Here, cloths woven in northern Nigeria compete in the market place with cloths produced in southern weaving centres such as Igara and Ekiti where many baby ties of the basket weave pattern are woven; and

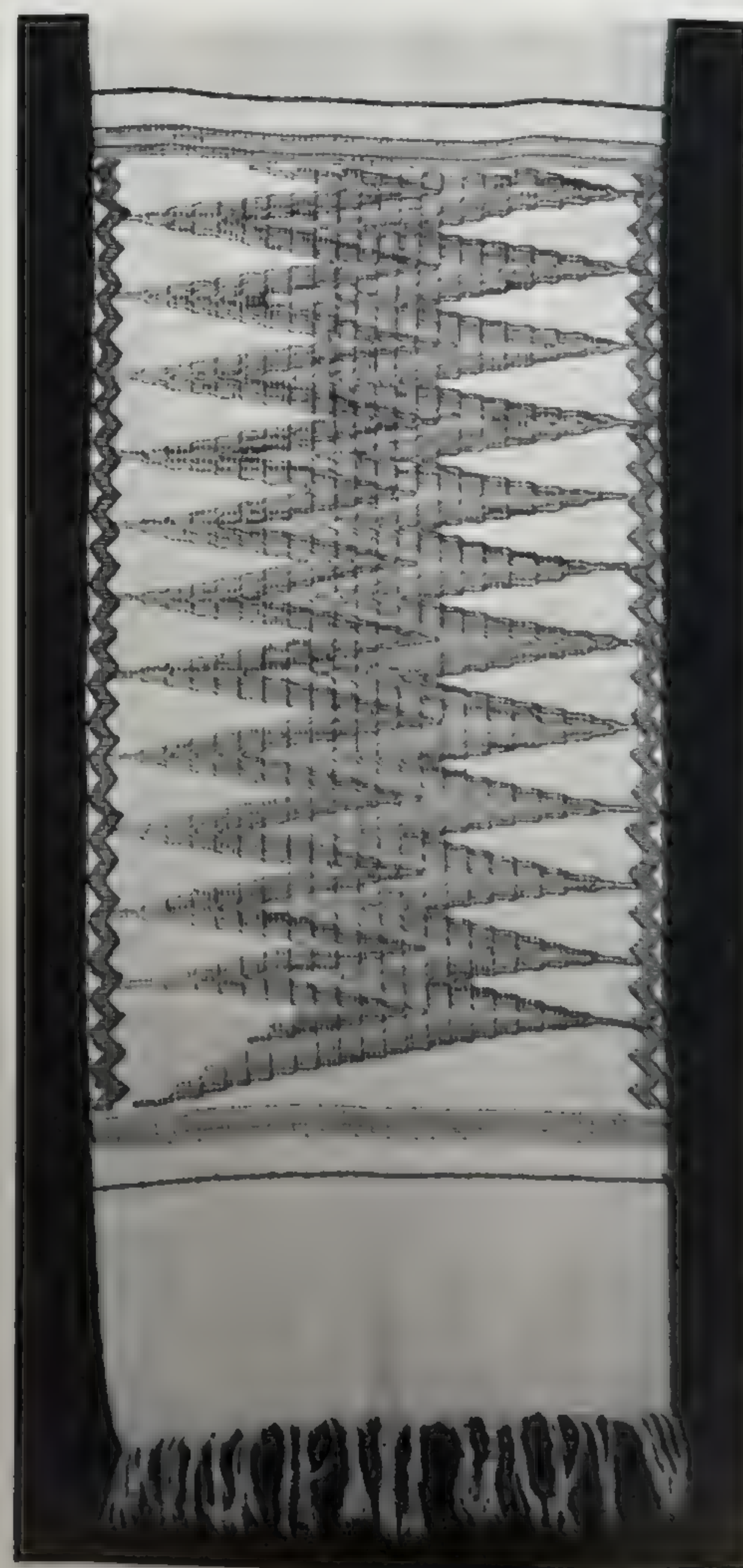
baby ties from northern Nigeria have undoubtedly been influenced in their design by cloth from many and diverse sources.

Our conclusion, after a considerable amount of work in the field, is that it would be virtually impossible to produce a consistent system of both typology and nomenclature for the great variety of cloths woven on the vertical loom in northern Nigeria. One can say, after some experience, that many cloths look 'northern'; but to define 'northern' in terms of specific patterns would be neither easy nor, we suspect, particularly profitable.

Marketing and distribution

In northern Nigeria women of childbearing age are, on the whole, by custom inclined to keep themselves within the confines of their households. Hence they do not, as a rule, attend markets. If they weave cloth for sale outside the compound, it can be taken to market by young girls or, perhaps, by male members of the family. In many northern markets one can see girls of pre-puberty age wandering about carrying on their heads piles of brightly coloured baby ties, *majayi*. A

414 An unusual Hausa cloth, possibly influenced by designs from Keffi. Kano market.



common practice in these circumstances, however, is for the weaver or weavers in a compound to deal with a trader who will make regular visits and collect cloths for sale. The trader, who is a man, will tend to deal with the same households on an established basis. I accompanied one such trader on his rounds in Zaria. He walked through that part of the city between the market and the dye pots, known as the weavers' area, through the narrow streets. He called in at the compound entrances, *zaure*, of weaving households with whom he had a relationship, and cloths ready for sale were handed out to him. No money changed hands until the final market sale had been completed. This particular trader had an extremely well stocked stall of his own in the Zaria market with a hundred or more *gwado*, *babban gwado* and *majayi* on display and ready for sale.

Another common method of distribution is by special order. By means of a network of family and friends a weaver in one compound will receive requests for cloths from members of other compounds. It is possible that a great part, perhaps the greatest part, of the cloth distribution in northern Nigeria takes place by this means.

Older women do not feel themselves so bound by the restrictions of seclusion; and they will sometimes go themselves to the market. I have witnessed a wordless exchange between an old lady and a market cloth seller on several occasions. The old lady, clad in her own handwoven *zane* and *kallabi*, will pass by the stall of the trader with whom she deals and pass a cloth over without a word. The trader will then hang it up beside the rest of his wares. On its sale, payment will be made to the weaver.

Wares in one market may well pass by means of intermediate traders to other markets. Large cloth markets such as those in Kano or Bauchi are fed, in effect, by an elaborate system of tributary markets. Traders may travel round a market cycle, buying and selling as they go. Various market cycles may intersect at one or more points; and by means of these junctions, so to speak, cloths can make their way from one end of Nigeria to the other. This fact, when one is concerned with the cheaper types of cloth, can lead to a considerable typological confusion. There can be no certainty that what is on sale in a market has, of necessity, been woven in the immediate neighbourhood. A great deal of cloth woven around Keffi and Nasarawa, for example, eventually finds its way into the hands of the Bororo Fulani in the north of



415 Fulani women near Abuja, wearing hand woven head cloths known as *adiko*, woven in the Keffi district.

Nigeria and, indeed, in Niger and other countries beyond Nigerian borders. Similarly, many of the baby ties found in the big markets of Sokoto, Kano and Kaduna may have come via Ilorin. There are few major markets in Nigeria which do not have, somewhere, cloths from Okene on sale. On the whole, the woman's vertical loom in Nigeria does not produce such elaborate and traditionally important cloths as elsewhere; but much of its output enters into an extremely active and vital trading system which ensures it the widest possible distribution. Much of this output still depends on locally grown cotton spun by hand in the age old way.

Notes

¹ Polly Hill, *Rural Hausa, a village and a setting*, Cambridge 1972, p. 321

² See: E. D. Morel, *Nigeria, its people and its problems*, London 1911, reprinted 1968, p. 127 for a reference to *argidi* cloth from Zaria



Vertical looms used by men

The Nigerian weaving craft does, on the whole, divide itself conveniently into two main categories, that involving the horizontal loom used by men and that involving the vertical loom used by women. There are, however, a number of cases where this convenient boundary between the sexes is crossed. We have already noted a case of a woman weaver working on the horizontal loom. In southern Nigeria there are two major examples of the vertical loom being used by men. The first is the loom used to weave cloths of raffia, derived from the leaf of one or other of the varieties of the raffia palm, *Raphia*, found native in Africa. This craft is found mainly among the Anang, the western members of the Ibibio-speaking peoples who live mainly in the southwestern corner of Cross River State between Ikot Ekpene and Opobo.¹ We have also seen raffia looms, slightly different from those of the Anang, in use around Ahoada in the north of Rivers State: these weavers would seem to be Ibo-speaking peoples of the Owerri Ibo group. The second example of a male vertical loom is in Benin where certain male weavers work in the Oba's Palace in Benin. These men, the *Owina N'Ido* Royal Weavers, are a fascinating example of a woman's craft which has passed into male hands quite recently and which survives today because of its intimate connection with traditional Nigerian Court ceremonial and ritual.

Raffia looms

Fibres other than cotton, wool and silk have been used for the weaving of textiles in Nigeria for at least a thousand years. The occurrence of bast material in the

archaeological horizon of Igbo-Ukwu has already been noted.² Something like raffia fibre was in use as a textile in Benin in about the thirteenth century AD according to the researches of Graham Connah;³ and in more recent times there is abundant evidence for the weaving of raffia, either alone or mixed with cotton, in many parts of southern Nigeria. Today, or until very recently, there was significant raffia weaving in other parts of coastal West Africa from Sierra Leone through Ghana and the Republic of Benin (Dahomey). Most raffia weaving in West Africa does, and did, take place on the vertical loom. However, there also exist, mainly from Dahomey, examples of raffia textiles made up from narrow strips which might possibly have been woven on the horizontal loom.

Today, on the whole, pure raffia weaving (as opposed to mixed raffia and cotton) is not particularly common in modern West Africa. Its true habitat now is along the western side of the African continent from Cameroun through Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Zaire to Angola. It thence appears to extend across Central Africa to the shores of the Indian Ocean, and in the island of Madagascar the weaving of raffia forms an important element in the complex pattern of crafts in that fascinating place which, in fairly recent times, was strongly influenced by settlers from the islands of Indonesia. The raffia weavers of southern Nigeria, who can most easily be found in Cross River State, probably mark a northwestern edge of a weaving complex which may well have its roots in Southeast Asia.

The greatest diversity of cloths using raffia to be found in Africa is probably in Madagascar.⁴ The most dramatic patterning is surely that of the pile raffia cloths of the Bakuba in Zaire. Compared to these the work of the Nigerian raffia weavers is relatively plain;

416 Anang raffia weaver working on his verandah in Ikot Ekpene. Note cross struts behind loom.



417 Ibibio trousers from Calabar, sewn from 14 inch panels, woven entirely from raffia, made before 1930. Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.

yet it is not without its charms. Raffia fabrics can be decorated with delightful appliqué pictures, or they can be woven in styles which recall the designs of the nearby women weavers of Akwete. The Nigerian vertical loom used by the Anang weavers is usually a fixed warp loom, that is to say the two ends are firmly secured to bars lashed horizontally across the loom frame. The frame differs from that of the woman's vertical loom in that it is usually strengthened by a cruciform brace consisting of two diagonal members linking the two uprights at their back, and looking like a St Andrew's cross. There exist raffia looms in this region which use, like the woman's loom, a rotating warp, but they, too, have the cruciform brace.⁵ The Ahoada looms are interesting in that they have uprights of raffia palm which are sunk in the ground so as to keep the loom vertical without the aid of any other support.

The process of raffia preparation has recently been described in detail by John Picton and John Mack.⁶ The raw material is a membrane derived from leaflets of the raffia palm, which is dried and split to yield hanks of long, fine, flexible fibres. In West Africa these fibres, other than drying, are usually not subjected to further treatment, though they can be dyed and, when mixed with cotton by women weavers for the making of baby ties, for example, they can undergo quite elaborate preparation. A problem with raffia fibre is that it cannot be spun like cotton, silk or

wool. The length of the fibre is the length of the membrane from which it is derived. In practice this length is quite convenient for a fixed warp vertical loom. To obtain longer fibres it is necessary to knot one length to another. This is sometimes done in Nigeria to make a continuous, rotating warp possible.

Among the Anang many raffia weavers are also carvers of the famous *Ekpo* masks, and they divide their time more or less equally between the two crafts. Raffia weaving is taught to young boys who by the age of eighteen or twenty are well qualified to produce material of good quality. Looms, which are portable, are set up either in house verandahs or in the garden within a compound. Unlike the woman's vertical loom, which requires a wall for its support, the raffia loom is free-standing and usually requires some kind of prop, such as a pole, a verandah pillar or a tree: sometimes the loom is slung from the verandah roof by means of a





417 Trousers from Calabar, seum from 14 inch panels, woven from raffia, made before 1930 Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford

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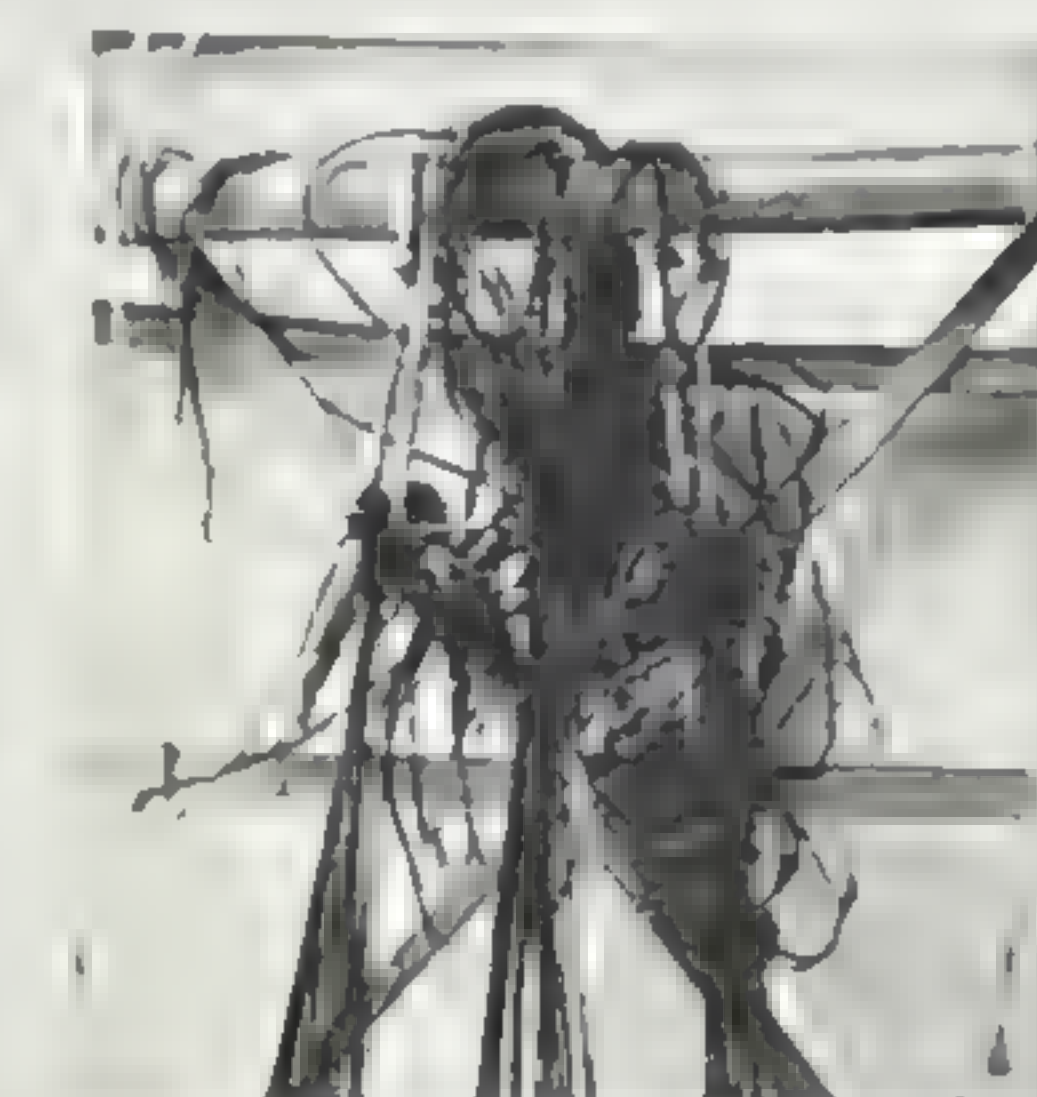
hooked piece of wood. The Anang raffia loom operates on the same single heddle principle as the woman's vertical loom. It has a particularly interesting feature in a toothed spreader bar of the kind also found in women's looms in Akwete and Abakaliki. The spreader bar is made of hardwood and its notching is executed in a distinctive manner. In cross-section the bar is diamond shaped, with the teeth or notches cut into the two points in the horizontal plane. The cutting of the teeth starts from the centre of the bar so that the teeth on either side of this place point slightly towards the ends of the bar, thus exerting an outward pressure across the warp. The remaining loom parts, shed sticks and sword, are made from raffia rib. The shuttle is a flattened stick with hook-like notches cut near either end.⁷

The following are some names for loom and loom parts used by the Anang in Ikot Ekpene

Vertical looms used by men

akapr rakpat—raffia palm
akparepat—loom
oror obat—shed stick
ekek—spreader
nkuw or abat—sword
akop—shuttle
nkon—heddle
ndam—warp and weft
epat—web

An interesting feature of raffia weaving is that, using weft threads of the natural fibre length, one will not obtain a proper selvedge. Unfinished, but fully woven, raffia cloth tends to have both warp and weft fringes. Most of the cloths we saw being woven in Ikot Ekpene had the weft ends tucked in to make a kind of selvedge. This tucking was done after each weft throw. Sometimes the weft ends were simply cut off. It is by



419 The tie-up of the raffia warps to the top bar of the Anang loom. Each bundle is tied to a supporting rope and tightened on the frame. Ikot Ekpene

418 The Anang raffia loom in Ikot Ekpene. Here the fixed lengths of the strands of raffia warps can be clearly seen. The notched spreader bar helps to keep the width of the web even, as the weaving progresses higher on the frame



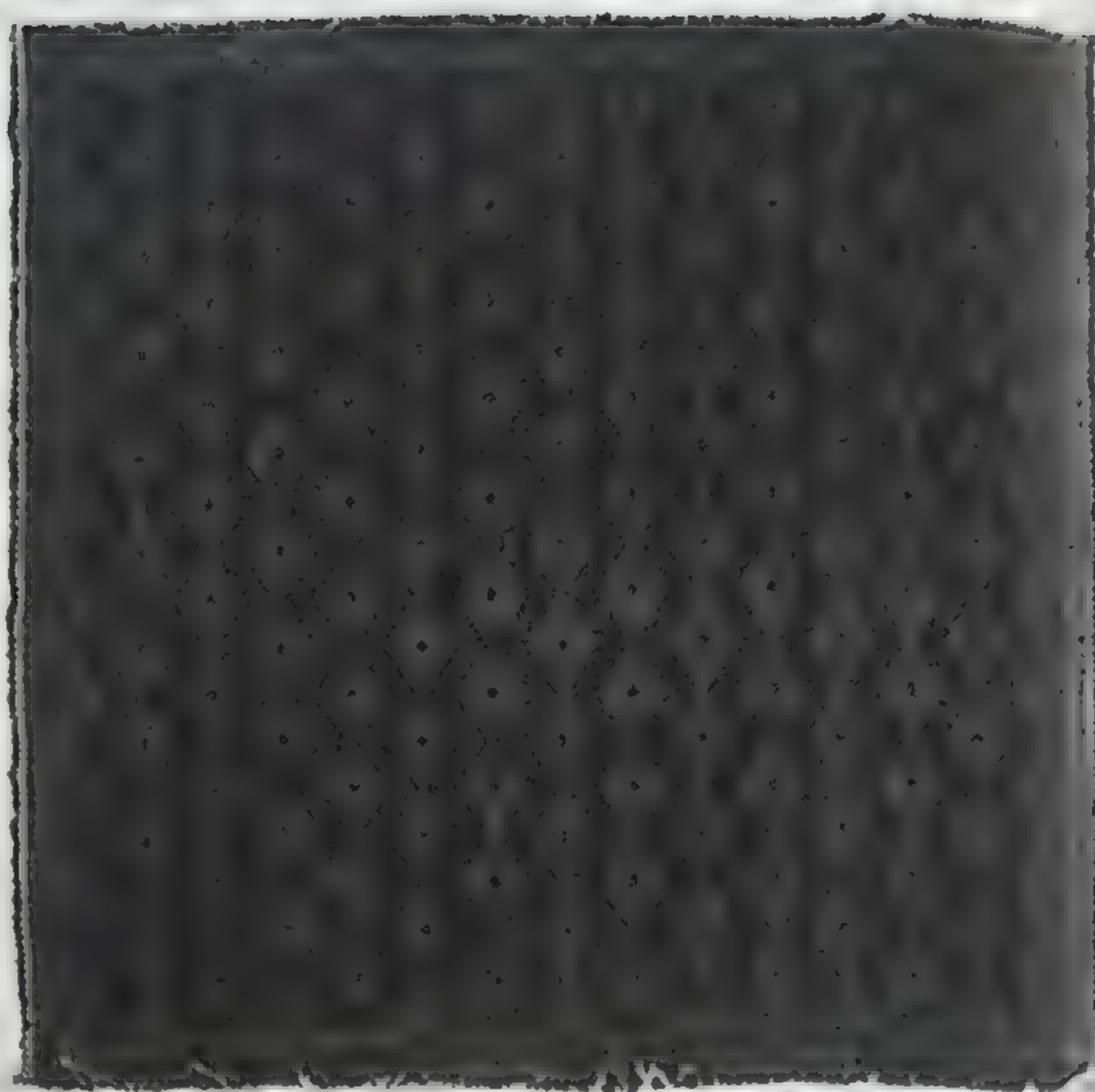
420 The raffia web being woven on the loom. The fixed lengths of the strands of raffia warps can be clearly seen. The notched spreader bar helps to keep the width of the web even, as the weaving progresses higher on the frame

no means uncommon in Africa to find raffia cloth with both warp and weft ends protruding from the web.

The traditional use for raffia cloth among the Anang and their neighbours has been for wrappers and covers, just as with cotton cloth. Raffia sleeping mats and raffia masquerade costumes were also much used. Today raffia still retains a traditional function in neighbouring regions. We have already noted the importance attached by some northern Edo women to special hats woven from raffia. Elsewhere, in Benin for example, raffia cloth aprons are worn along with Ijebu-Ode cloth at certain rituals. In Ikot Ekpene some raffia cloths of ritual importance are still woven. There is, for example, *enam*, worn by older persons who have passed through two age set groups. This is a single-panel cloth fringed along one side by leaving the weft ends hanging free. It has a role in masquerades associated with the yam harvest. Another such cloth is *ukpa*. It is a red panel worn by members of the *Ekpo* Society. In the past, we were told, Chiefs in battle would use an *ukpa* cloth as the equivalent of the European white flag, a signal to indicate the desire to cease fighting. A Chief with this aim in mind would drape an *ukpa* cloth around his shoulders and stand forward in front of the enemy while his followers blew on horns. Today among members of the *Ekpo* Society the *ukpa* cloth has become standardized, but we were informed that there used to be some distinctive design feature to identify different lodges of the Society.

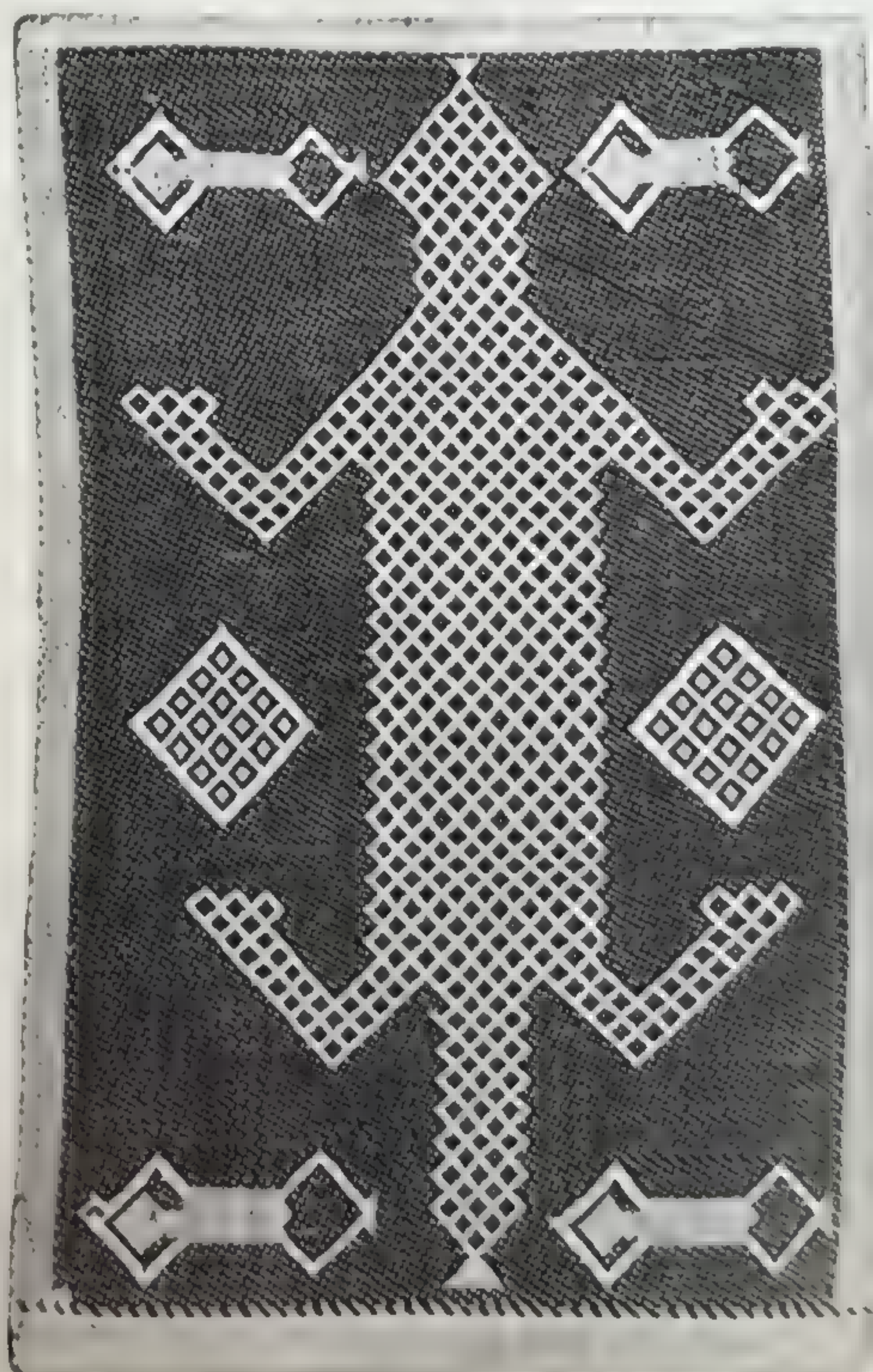
The production of raffia cloth by the Anang involves dyeing as well as weaving. Traditionally red came from Guineacorn stalks, yellow from onion skins or a root called *rawaya*, green from a leaf known as *awa*, and black was derived from a certain river mud mixed with Guineacorn and potash. Today these have all been replaced by chemical dyes.

Most Anang weavers combine their craft with farming and other tasks. While very individualistic in their patterns of work, weavers in Ikot Ekpene have of late started a cooperative association which helped with the purchase of raffia fibre and dyes and provided an outlet for finished products. Raffia, it would seem, was not easy to find of late (1979) in the Ikot Ekpene area: it was mainly acquired in Calabar. Some of the cloths we saw being woven in Ikot Ekpene contained cotton along with raffia in the warp, particularly in the case of the larger cloths. We were interested to find how many cotton-cloth designs which we had encountered elsewhere in Nigeria were used in Ikot Ekpene raffia, not least the basket weave



421 A 36 inch wide sleeping mat woven at Ikot Ekpene. The use of a continuous weft inlay design suggests a possible link with designs found among Zaire raffia cloths.

422 Example of a raffia cloth from Zaire, illustrated by Coart in 1926. Tervuren, Belgium.



(compound weave) pattern. This pattern, 'guinea fowl' or 'tortoise' as it is often called throughout West Africa, has long been associated with raffia as well as cotton. We know, for example, of an old two-panel marriage cloth from Dahomey with this pattern;⁸ and another example from Zaire is in the possession of the British Museum.⁹

The creation of a cooperative at Ikot Ekpene has affected the nature of the output of the local raffia weaving industry. Today a large number of extremely non-traditional objects, table mats, hand bags, wallets, briefcases, wall hangings and the like are being made.¹⁰ Although helping to keep a craft alive which would otherwise have been on the verge of extinction, this deviation from traditional use has undoubtedly contributed to a decline in both quality and aesthetic appeal of Ikot Ekpene raffia. In remoter areas of this part of Cross River State, however, there are some more isolated raffia weavers who still adhere to older ways and produce older designs of cloth types.

The Owina N'Ido Royal Weavers of Benin

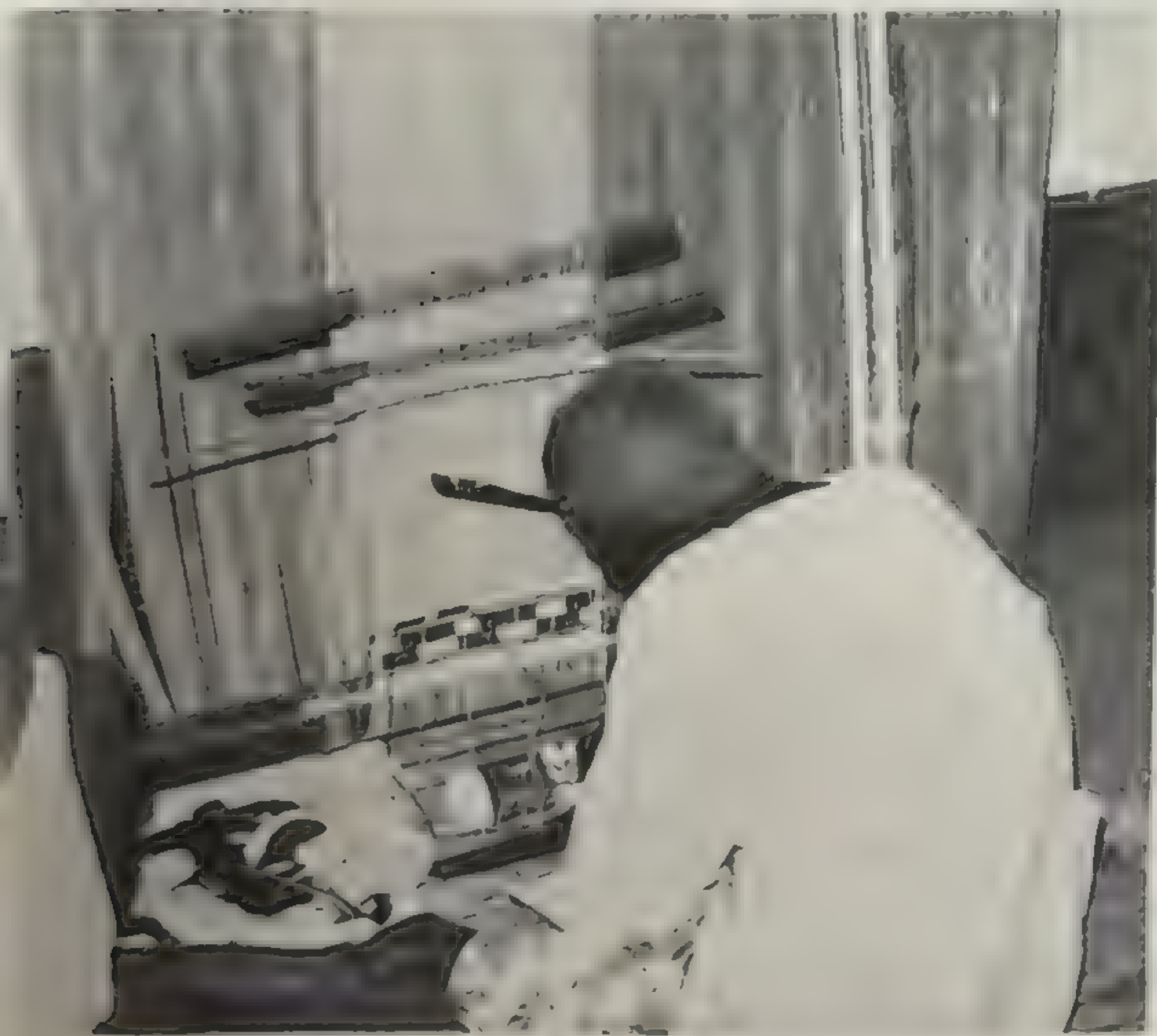
In the Oba's Palace in Benin there is still carried on an extremely interesting weaving tradition said to have started in the fourteenth century in the reign of the Oba Ohen.¹¹ Originally this work was carried out by a small group of Palace women, who made cloth for special Court use. There were seven such women, the story goes, who annoyed Oba Ohen by selling some of

this special cloth in the ordinary market: he thereupon decided to reserve this weaving for men. Other evidence, already noted, suggests that the transfer from women to men took place rather more recently, perhaps in the second part of the nineteenth century. Today the craft is in the hands of a Guild consisting of the Elders, namely the *Okao*, *Obazona*, *Esamegho*, and *Odionwere*, who supervise the work of the weavers, the *Edion* assisted by the various male children of Guild members, *Itae-eguae*, who in general run errands and perform odd chores.

The *Owina N'Ido* Guild, as this association of weavers is called, still works on commission from the Oba's Palace to produce cloth for the Oba and for Chiefs and Priests within his household. The looms are set up in the Iwebo section of the Palace if the work in hand is destined for the Oba's personal use; but work for Chiefs and Priests is carried out in the weavers' homes. Two types of yarn are used. One, derived from the bark of a tree called *ikhuian*, can only be used in cloths for the Oba. It is prepared by Palace women. The other yarn is cotton, brought down to Benin from the north. At one time Ishan was said to be an important source of cotton for Benin; but we have found that cotton is no longer grown in the Ishan region.

At least when used in the Palace, the loom is not a permanent structure but is constructed expressly for any one order. The loom is in fact a fairly typical vertical loom of the kind discussed elsewhere in this book. When using cotton, the warp threads are rather thick and widely spaced. The loom uses a toothed spreader (not shown in the illustration reproduced here which does not include the top of the loom) of the kind found in Akwete, Abakaliki and among the Anang raffia weavers. The pattern is inserted by the tapestry method, quite unusual in Nigerian women's weaving: it is part of the fabric of the cloth rather than something floated over the web. Cloth is woven in very narrow panels, about ten inches in width, and the designs included can be highly representational human figures.

The Oba may wear cloth from this loom on a number of ceremonial occasions; and it plays a part in burials and other rituals. We have been fortunate to be able to illustrate here the late Oba Akenzua II wearing a wide-skirted garment known as *iyerhuan* made from many



423 Rare picture of an Owina N'Ido weaver working in the Palace of the Oba of Benin. He is using a miniature vertical loom. The width of the panel is 10 inches.



424 The late Oba Akenzua II, wearing a large Owina N'Ido cloth of the iyerhuan type. This wide skirt-like cloth is sewn from many panels.

panels of this cloth.¹² It is said that it takes up to two years to weave enough cloth for a garment such as this. The late Oba Akenzua II is reported to have ordered two garments of this kind to be made for him,¹³ and his predecessor, Oba Eweka II, ordered three. The present Oba Erediauwa is not shown wearing this garment in the published photographs of his installation; and it has been suggested that the custom of ordering these extremely complex cloths has now virtually died out. We hope, however, that the tradition still survives. At all events, somewhere in store in the Iwebo section of the Oba's Palace there must be some of the greatest masterpieces of the Nigerian weaver's craft.

It is interesting that, on purely stylistic grounds, the *Owina N'Ido* cloths remind one of the appliqué designs evolved at the Court of Dahomey in the nineteenth century if not much earlier. At Abomey, the old Dahomey capital, there also survives a Guild of Royal Weavers, in this case men working on the narrow

horizontal loom, who make cloth with very elaborate inlay designs of a representational nature; and something of this tradition of patterning has survived among the Ewe male weavers in Ghana. It is quite possible that there may have been some connections between Court ceremonial and ritual at Abomey and Benin, just as there has been between the ceremonies and rituals of the major Courts of Europe. In West Africa, however, it is only at the Oba's Palace in Benin that this particular use of woven cloth with representational patterning survives in connection with a living Court. The old Dahomey Palace at Abomey is today a museum.¹⁴

Notes

¹ D. Forde & G. I. Jones, *The Ibo and Ibilio-speaking Peoples of South-eastern Nigeria*, London 1950, p. 81.

² See Introduction.

³ See Introduction.

⁴ For raffia weaving in Africa and Madagascar, see: J. Picton & J. Mack, *African Textiles*, London 1979. This is the catalogue of a major exhibition of all aspects of textiles in Africa, which opened at the Museum of Mankind (British Museum), London, in December 1979.

See also: E. de Castro e Almeida & M. Vieira, *Contribuição para o estudo dos teares na Lunda (Angola)*, Lisbon 1961.

⁵ Among the weavers of Afafa-Obong, for example. We are indebted to Keith Nicklin for this information. For an illustration of such a loom, see: Picton and Mack, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁶ Picton and Mack, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-7.

⁷ Much of the information in this section is based on fieldwork by J. Holmes in Ikot Ekpene in 1978 and 1979.

⁸ R. Sieber, *African Textiles and Decorative Arts*, New York 1972, p. 162, illustrates a cloth collected in Dahomey by Herskovits.

⁹ Illustrated in Picton and Mack, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

¹⁰ See, for example: K. A. Robinson, 'Ikot Ekpene Raphia Mats', *Nigeria Magazine*, 1938.

¹¹ The main sources for the *Owina N'Ido* weavers are: P. Ben-Amos, 'Owina N'Ido—Royal Weavers of Benin', *African Arts*, XI, 1978; P. J. C. Dark, *An Introduction to Benin Art and Technology*, Oxford 1973, pp. 66-7.

¹² This picture was published in *Coronation of Oba Erediauwa*, a special work issued by the *Daily Times*, Lagos 1979.

For an illustration of Oba Akenzua II wearing another cloth of this type, see: Picton and Mack, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

¹³ It is probable, therefore, that these two cloths are those illustrated here and in Picton and Mack.

¹⁴ The Court weavers of Abomey are still at work; but much of their output, like that of the appliqué-makers, is destined for the tourist market. For a most interesting account of the meaning of appliqué in Dahomey, see: J. Gabus, *Art Nègre*, Neuchâtel 1967.

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